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MARION LESLIE:

A STORY.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1863.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY R. BORN, GLOUCESTER STREET,
REGENT'S PARK.

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MARION LESLIE.

CHAPTER I.

ON reaching London, Philip Mowbray and Menteith drove at once to the address given in the letter. It was one of those narrow streets off the Strand, which abound with lodging-houses and lawyers' offices, and the house indicated in the letter had a dingy, dilapidated look, like most of its neighbours.

Menteith's vigorous use of the knocker brought a servant to the door, who demanded their business; but, before they could answer, her mistress appeared and invited them to enter. She divined at once the object of their visit, and told them that she had been a servant in Nairn's family for many years, and

that he was in the habit of lodging with her when his means prevented him from living at his hotel. He had come to town more than a week ago, and, after two days' incessant drinking, had been attacked with delirium tremens—or "D. T." as she delicately called it. It was in consequence of this attack that she had written the letter.

The honest Scotchwoman, who had been Nairn's nurse, had the delicacy not to mention that her house and her purse had been ever open to him in his difficulties, and that he had availed himself largely of both, without dreaming of any return.

When Menteith spoke a few kind words to her, and told her he bore the same name as Nairn, and was distantly connected with him, she fairly broke down, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

"Oh, sirs, to think that my ain bairn, who was dear to me as a son, should have turned out such a ne'er-do-weel. Guid help him!—Guid help him!"

Here the noise of a struggle was heard in the upper part of the house, and the servant-girl, bursting into the room, exclaimed—

“Oh, missus, the sick gentleman has got out of bed, and is forcing his way downstairs!”

Mowbray and Menteith, without further parley, hurried up-stairs, and found Nairn, in his night-dress, struggling with a man who had been engaged to watch him. The three contrived to get him to bed without much difficulty, and, after dismissing the keeper, Mowbray and Menteith sat down beside him.

It was horrible to listen to the poor wretch, and it would only shock the reader if his words were repeated. The imagination of Dante, in his “Inferno,” could not have invented a more fearful punishment for the lost than that which the drunkard entails on himself even in this world. But we draw the curtain over the dark imagery of terror which haunted Nairn, and led him now to blaspheme the name of his Maker, and then to appeal to Him for mercy. If it

has ever been the reader's fate to watch for a night by the bedside of one labouring under the drunkard's disease, he will appreciate our motives for doing so.

For the first three days after their arrival it was doubtful whether Nairn would recover. Mowbray called in a well-known physician, who had made this disease his *spécialité*. On learning who his patient was, he shook his head, and expressed his fears about the result; the constitution of his patient was already weakened by dissipation, and this attack, which was not the first, might cut him off. Mowbray requested him to stay with them as much as his other duties would permit, and to spare no expense.

They never left his bedside—there was a sofa in the room, which they occupied by turns.

It was fortunate for Nairn that the doctor took an interest in his case, or, rather in certain new phases of this disease; it was probably owing to this circumstance that he recovered.

The attack left him weak as a child. When he recognized Mowbray and Men-

teith at his bedside, he turned his face to the wall, and wept. When he learned from his nurse all that they had done for him, and how they had saved his life, he was profuse in his professions of gratitude and promises of amendment.

The two friends were pleased to find that he was not dead to all right feeling, but they knew his character too well to attach much importance to these expressions, however sincere they might be at the moment they were uttered: Nairn was the slave of his evil habits, and had neither the desire nor the power to escape from his chains.

The doctor had recommended change of air, and a limited allowance of drink. Men-teith wrote repeatedly to Nairn's father; but his letters remained unanswered. He had married a second wife, who stipulated beforehand that his graceless son should never be admitted to his house. It required no great sacrifice of paternal feeling to comply with this condition, as the father and son had not spoken to one another for years, and were as much estranged

from one another as if the same blood had never flowed in their veins.

Nairn's father was unwilling, however, to avow to the world that he had discarded his son, and left him dependent on the charity of others; he deemed it more prudent to leave the letters unanswered, and to allow them to put any construction they chose upon his silence.

The two friends were at a loss what to do with Nairn. At times they were almost tempted to think that it would have been better to have allowed him to die, and to pass from the world unnoticed and unknown; but their generous hearts struggled against such a thought. But what was to be done with him? If they left him in London, with no one to control him, he would be exposed to a second attack, which would probably prove fatal. Besides, it was of the last consequence that he should be out of the way for a time, till some arrangement had been made with Heavysides and his other creditors.

At length a bright idea struck Mowbray, which he lost no time in communicating to Menteith, who at once approved of

it. They telegraphed to the commander of Mowbray's yacht at Cowes, to hurry up to London. On his arrival Nairn was committed to his care, with instructions to take him wherever he chose to go, and to give him a limited allowance of drink. After seeing him off, Mowbray and Men-teith returned to Windsor.

A few days of bracing sea-air and comparative abstinence produced a wonderful change upon Nairn. The commander of the yacht was a kind-hearted sailor, who, while he did everything to amuse him, had sufficient firmness to refuse him more than his allowance of drink. After a time the insatiable craving passed away, and Nairn recovered much of his former health and spirits. On learning that the yacht was at his disposal, he desired the commander to sail for Islayhead, as he wished to visit some of his estates in that part of Scotland.

The commander knew that Nairn's castles were only *châteaux en Espagne*, and that his estates existed only in his own imagination, but he thought it best to humour him, and, without inquiring into

his motives for visiting such a remote place, set sail at once for Islayhead, which they reached in two days.

The appearance of such a neat craft as the "Nereid" caused no small sensation among the fishermen and other inhabitants of Islayhead, who supposed at first that it was some government official sent down to inquire into the statistics of the herring trade.

Nairn remained some days on board without landing, and amused himself with fishing in the bay. The only visit he received was from old Adam Mackay, the miller; there had been some pecuniary transactions between them on a former occasion, and Adam was prepared to renew them if he found a safe investment for his money. Owing to Mowbray's liberality Nairn had no immediate want of money, but with an eye to future contingencies he thought it prudent to be civil to the old usurer, and invited him to spend the day on board the yacht. He was also anxious to know whether Miss Leslie was at Inverchewan Castle, and by plying Mackay with liquor he obtained all the information from him he desired.

“Ay, ay, my lord, Miss Leslie is there. She has just come back from foreign parts, and who but she? It is Miss Leslie here, and Miss Leslie there, and Miss Leslie everywhere; I have seen the day when less *Missing* would have saired her. Is there any word of her getting a man? It will no be for want of wooers. He that gets her will have a canty down-sitting. Your lordship might gang farther and fare waur; but I do not think the lassie would look at you. She has an old love here, who has turned out a great scholar, and aiblins she will marry him. Who is this old joe? Oh, he is just a nephew of my own, a son of John Kynoch’s — you remember him, ‘Stormy Jack,’ as they call him. Demean herself by marrying him? Aweel, they cannot cast up one another’s kin, for the Kynochs are as good as the Leslies, ony day. Old Leslie, who bought Inverchewan, made his siller by couping kye; and though the lad be poor, he has as good blood in his veins as the lassie Leslie. If they two be willing to make a match of it, what for no?”

Nairn smiled at the old miller’s conceit, and thought, as he surveyed himself in the

mirror, that he had little to fear from such a rival as Stormy Jack's son.

He parted from the miller with the promise that he would apply to him if he should require any money before returning to the south.

Next day he landed from the yacht, and drove to Inverchewan Castle. He was admitted to the drawing-room, where he found Mr. and Mrs. Leslie waiting to receive him. It was one of the peculiarities of this unfortunate young man that he could discover, as it were, intuitively, the foibles and weaknesses of those he met, and turn them to his own advantage, when he had any purpose to serve. He contrived, in the course of ten minutes' conversation, to be on the most confidential terms with both, by recounting to the laird certain deeds of heroism performed by the Leslies of yore, for the knowledge of which he was entirely indebted to his own imagination, and by confessing to Mrs. Leslie that in his opinion hereditary titles were not half so valuable as those which the lords of session acquired through their profound knowledge of Scottish jurisprudence.

At length Miss Leslie entered, accompanied by Miss Gammock; she blushed deeply on recognizing Nairn, whose perfect self-possession soon placed her at her ease. She had never told her uncle or aunt that she had met Nairn in France; she could not have done so without mentioning the circumstances under which she had met him, and her sense of delicacy prevented her from alluding to the subject, even with Miss Gammock. Nairn's tact enabled him at once to understand that they were to meet as strangers; he was pleased with this arrangement. There was a secret known only to himself and Miss Leslie, and that secret was already a bond of union between them.

He contrived to make himself so agreeable to the whole family that the laird invited him to remain and share their family dinner. He agreed to do so, on condition that Mr. Leslie should devote an hour or two in the evening to the description of the pictures which adorned the portrait gallery, as he had reason to believe that there had been *liens* between the Menteiths and the Leslies in past generations, though it had

often been their fate to meet in honourable strife on the field of battle. This was said *sotto voce*, and intended only for the laird's hearing, as he knew that his wife and niece did not share in his belief in the antiquity of the Leslie family, or the genuineness of the portraits for which the laird had paid so high a price.

Dinner at the Castle was usually a dull affair ; but Nairn contrived to impart something of his own liveliness to all around—he was quite at ease himself, and contrived to draw his entertainers out on their favourite topics without letting them know that he was doing so. He fairly won Mrs. Leslie's heart by declaring that Edinburgh was in every respect worthy of the title of "Modern Athens;" that nowhere else was the Attic salt to be found in such purity and freshness; that Lais and Aspasia were out-rivalled in beauty by the ladies of Prince's Street; that many an Aristides was to be found on the bench, and more than one Demosthenes among the long-robed gentlemen who walked the Parliament House.

He won the laird's heart in the portrait gallery by the eloquence of patient listening

—an eloquence little understood or appreciated by young men at the present day, but which is often more effective with their seniors than the highest flights of oratory. Altogether Nairn made a very favourable impression; when he proposed to leave next morning the laird urged him to make the Castle his home during his stay at Islay-head. Nairn was too prudent to accept this offer; he was acting a part which was irksome to him, and which would have been intolerable if he had had to keep it up constantly. He knew his own evil nature, and dreaded lest in some unguarded moment he should show himself in his true character. He was visited at times, though rarely, by the old insatiable craving for drink, and felt that he was safer under restraint.

It was remarked by the ladies, after he left the Castle, that the young lord must be one of the most temperate of men, as he had scarcely tasted wine at dinner. He was anxious to preserve this good character, and he knew that he was safest on board the yacht.

He gladly availed himself, however, of the

laird's invitation to visit the Castle as often as he found it convenient, and scarcely a day passed without his spending several hours in Miss Leslie's society. He knew all the approved ways of approaching the citadel of a woman's heart, and no wonder that Marion, young, inexperienced, and fancy free, felt the influence of his power.

Ninian met them one day by accident. They had come down to Loanhead to hire a boat to convey them to some rocky island near the entrance of the bay, where they proposed to lunch, and to return in the afternoon. It was the height of the fishing season, and the men were all at sea; a boat could easily be had, but a boat was of no use without boatmen.

While Nairn, Marion, and Miss Gammock were standing on the beach, deliberating what should be done, Ninian was informed of their difficulty, and came to their assistance.

It was the first time that he had met Marion face to face for four years. He understood now all that Alice had said. As he gazed on the beautiful being before him, he felt that she, indeed, belonged to a dif-

ferent world, and that it would be as presumptuous for him to try to reach her, as for a child to grasp at a star. He was so fascinated by her appearance that he stood riveted to the spot, without being able to speak. Marion, while she felt somewhat confused by the admiring looks of the stranger, never dreamed that it was her old playfellow Ninian who now stood before her.

When he introduced himself to her, she expressed her pleasure at finding him so much improved in appearance and manners. She did so with perfect self-possession, and though her manner was kind and even familiar, Ninian felt that there was a great gulf between them. As he seated himself in the boat, and looked at the handsome creature who had taken the helm and begun to steer with all the ease of an old sailor, he began to doubt whether this could be his old playfellow Marion, and to feel his own folly in ever aspiring to the hand of one who seemed to belong to a different world.

His attention was so much distracted by her presence, that he neglected to keep time,

and Nairn, on turning round, observed that Marion was the cause of his distraction. Nairn knew nothing about Ninian; he supposed him to be one of those young men who are always to be found lounging about sea-port towns, and who, while too proud to work, are not above making a little money by any stray job which comes in their way. Displeased alike with his rowing, and with his undisguised admiration for Miss Leslie, he said:—

“My good fellow, it is easy to see that you are a fresh-water sailor.”

Ninian laughed good-naturedly, and, looking at Miss Leslie, said,—

“Marion knows better.”

Nairn pricked up his ears at these words, and looked at Marion with a mingled expression of curiosity and surprise. Here was a stranger who addressed her at once by a name which he had never yet dared to use. She remarked with perfect composure,

“I forgot to introduce you when we entered the boat, Lord Nairn—this is Ninian Kynoch, in whose father’s house I was brought up till I was sixteen years of age. He was the companion of my childhood,

and on more than one occasion saved my life. You ought to know him, for he is a very distinguished scholar."

Nairn's brow darkened; he remembered what old Mackay, the miller, had told him, and was foolish enough to look upon Ninian in the light of a rival. He bowed haughtily to Ninian, who returned his salutation with equal stiffness; he had heard something of Nairn's antecedents, and believed him unworthy of having Marion's happiness in his keeping.

The two young men were silent for a time. Nairn was the first to regain his self-composure, but when he spoke he addressed himself almost entirely to Marion, or, if he spoke to Ninian, it was in a tone of *persiflage* which the latter keenly felt, though he would not retaliate. He congratulated him on belonging to a university which had trained two such distinguished men as Dr. Peter Pangloss and Major Dugald Dalgetty; he praised the artistic cut of his clothes, and inquired who was his hatter. Ninian had not heard before of these distinguished members of his *alma mater*, but he was quick enough to perceive

that Nairn was amusing himself at his expense, and resented his well-bred insolence.

An opportunity of revenge soon occurred, which Ninian, with all his good-nature, could not resist. As they were returning, the wind proved favourable; Ninian proposed that they should hoist the sail, and invited Nairn to assist him. He issued his orders in language which would have been familiar to any sailor, but which was perfectly unintelligible to Nairn. Ninian could not avoid laughing heartily at the mistakes he made. Nairn's displeasure was increased by observing that Marion joined once or twice in the laugh, and shewed that she was a better sailor than himself by coming to Ninian's assistance. He became sulky and silent, and sat in a corner of the boat, absorbed in his own thoughts, without taking any notice of his two companions, who were speaking of their former life, and recalling many past scenes.

When they addressed Nairn he showed no desire to take part in their conversation, and it was only when the boat shipped a wave which wet him to the skin, that he started to his feet and swore that Ninian,

who was at the helm, had done it intentionally. They had some difficulty in pacifying him, and the boat soon after this reached Loanhead.

The carriage was waiting to convey Marion and Nairn to the Castle. Marion was not wanting in spirit, and to mark her disapproval of Nairn's boorish conduct, she invited Ninian to accompany them—an invitation which the young man had not the self-denial to refuse. Mr. and Mrs. Leslie received him with politeness, though they could scarcely understand Marion's motive for inviting him to the house. She contrived to seat herself beside him at table, and bestow her whole attention upon him; while Nairn was obliged to listen to the laird's remarks, which were not usually of an interesting or edifying character. Contrary to his usual wont at the Castle, he drank deep, and, when Ninian rose to leave, Nairn, notwithstanding the urgent invitations of his host, insisted on accompanying him.

The two young men walked for about a mile in silence. Ninian had spoken once or twice, but Nairn returned no answer. It

was a beautiful moonlight night. The sea with its belt of sand lay extended before them like a mirror in a white frame; no sound was to be heard save the distant song of the fisherman as he watched his nets, and sang one of those slow, melancholy airs which sound like a dirge.

Nairn had no sympathy with the silent, calm beauty of the scene—through drink, anger, and jealousy, he had lost all control over himself; and when they reached a point where the road diverged to Loanhead, and Ninian was about to leave him, he confronted him, and ordered him to stop. He used much stronger terms than we care to repeat.

Nairn was emphatically a coward, and had proved himself to be so on the field of battle; but he thought there could be little danger in bullying this pale-faced student.

“Stop a little. You and I do not part so soon: we have a small account to settle together. Curse you, you low hound!—what do you mean by insulting me, a nobleman and a gentleman? You have not got a lady to protect you now, so take *that!*”

He struck at Ninian's face with the cane which he held in his hand—the former raised his left arm, and warded off the blow. It was only the work of an instant to close with Nairn, to wrest the cane from his hand, and to break it in pieces; but, as yet, Ninian struck no blow.

Nairn mistook his forbearance for pusillanimity, and, mad with rage, struck him with all his force in the face, while he was off his guard.

Ninian reeled beneath the blow, but, recovering himself before it could be repeated, he struck Nairn on the forehead, with such force that he fell senseless to the ground. His anger yielded at once to remorse and terror—he might be a murderer!

He loosed his cravat and vest, but there were no signs of life. He ran to a neighbouring brook, filled his hat with water and poured it on his face—but he breathed not! Was he dead? Had he slain a man in his mad wrath?

There was a cottage about half a mile distant: he might procure assistance there.

No time was to be lost—once only he turned round, about half-way to the cottage—in the clear moonlight he saw a tall figure near the spot where Nairn fell. Was it a real figure, or the work of his imagination? He stopped not to inquire, but hurried on to the cottage. About ten minutes were spent before he discovered that it was uninhabited. He felt himself strong enough to carry Nairn in his arms to Loanhead, where medical advice could be procured.

Judge of his surprise, on reaching the spot where Nairn had fallen, to find that he was gone. There were no traces of their struggle, save the broken parts of the cane. What was that sparkling on the ground? He stooped down to pick it up; as he did so, a powerful hand grasped his arm. He turned round and beheld Stirling, the schoolmaster.

CHAPTER II.

NINIAN knew that Stirling added to his other avocations, lawful and unlawful, that of smuggler; his sudden appearance, therefore, at this juncture caused him no surprise; he supposed that he had been engaged, with some of his associates, in landing cargo from a French lugger, which had been seen hovering about the coast in the morning.

At the period of which we write, smuggling was so universal on the east coast of Scotland, that it ceased to be regarded as a crime, and even those who had doubts about the legitimacy of importing contraband goods had no scruples about purchasing them when once imported.

This illicit traffic was favoured by the numerous caves which are to be found

along the coast; the goods were landed at night, stored in these caves, and conveyed into the interior when a favourable opportunity occurred.

The claret and the brandy offered to the stranger guest in manse or mansion house were always of the best; it would have been an ungenerous return for such hospitality to have inquired whether they had paid King's duty.

During the reign of the three first kings of the house of Hanover, it was thought meritorious, rather than otherwise, to defraud the revenue, by those Jacobites who believed that an unlawful monarch was seated on the throne; and even at a much later period such malpractices were common among those who could not justify their conduct on the ground of political principles.

It might have been expected that the clergy would have set their faces against a traffic which often led to deeds of violence, and corrupted the morals of their parishioners. But many of the clergy were miserably paid, and when a few kegs of brandy or a cask of good Bordeaux

were occasionally left at the door of their manses, when they were discreetly asleep, there was a strong temptation to wink at the traffic by which they themselves profited. Mr. Hamilton had incurred much odium, on his first arrival, by denouncing smuggling from the pulpit; his remarks were regarded as personal by most of the members of his congregation, because most of them were engaged in it. Of course a minister ought never to be personal; it is an abuse of ministerial power, inasmuch as there is no power of reply; he ought only to indulge in those general platitudes which please everybody, because they injure no one, and perhaps—benefit no one.

Mr. Hamilton's predecessor was a man of different principles—he recognized smuggling as one of the institutions of Islayhead. It was even asserted that, on more than one occasion, he had allowed the contraband goods to be stored in the church and the manse when a surprise was dreaded, and that this *ruse* succeeded, as even the most suspicious exciseman could never have imagined that the minister would have touched the

unclean thing. It was said, also, that a Highlander with a shaggy pony, loaded with bladders full of mountain dew, paid periodic visits to the manse, and that the son of the Gael returned to his home with empty bladders, but a full purse. It was certain, at least, that the whisky at the manse had that delicious *bouquet* of peat reek which Lowland distillers have tried in vain to imitate, and that when the brethren of the Presbytery dined with their brother at Islayhead, they always indulged in a few additional tumblers, or *ekes*, as they knew that such indulgence would not be followed by the usual Nemesis in the shape of a headache next morning.

But why, the reader may ask, this digression upon smuggling, when the hero of the tale and one of the sub-heroes have been left in a critical position? To this we simply reply that every author has a right to tell his story in his own way, and that what may appear to the reader a digression is no digression at all, but as necessary a part of the story as the exordium is to a sermon, or the overture to an opera.

The reader, the gentle, reasonable reader, will now understand that Stirling did not lose the respect of the community in which he lived through his smuggling practices. If he had stolen the most trifling article belonging to his neighbour he would have been driven from Loanhead with disgrace, but to defraud the revenue was considered a meritorious act, and a successful smuggler, one who deserved well of his country.

As Ninian is in no immediate danger, and Nairn was left in a rather critical condition, it may be as well to return to him, and to explain his disappearance.

The blow which Ninian struck him might have seriously injured any man with a skull of ordinary thickness; but Nairn, as was shewn at an after period in his history, had a skull bordering more on the negro type than the Caucasian in point of thickness, and to this circumstance he owed his safety. He was stunned, but not seriously injured.

He might have continued insensible, however, till Ninian returned, if Stir-

ling had not come up and found him. The schoolmaster was returning home, after assisting in stowing away the cargo of the French lugger in a cave among the rocks, known to the peasantry as the Cave of Horrors, and supposed to be haunted by unearthly visitors.

He had been attracted to the spot by the sound of voices quarrelling, and hid behind a wall till he saw the result of the struggle. He witnessed in silence Ninian's onsternation and vain efforts to restore Nairn to consciousness, and waited till he had disappeared in search of assistance before he rose from behind the wall and hurried to the spot where Nairn lay. He recognized him at once, as his person was now well known about Loanhead, from his frequent visits to the Castle.

The first impulse of any person possessed of common humanity would have been to strive to render him some assistance, but Stirling was an old campaigner, and his first impulse—an impulse on which he proceeded at once to act—was to search his pockets. When

he found his purse he lost no time in emptying it of its contents, and conveying the gold which it contained to his own pocket — all except a Napoleon, which he intentionally dropped on the ground. He replaced the purse where he had found it, and then examined Nairn's watch. After a moment's consideration, he slowly restored it to its place. It would have been dangerous for him to retain such an article in his possession, and he had no immediate means of disposing of it.

He stooped down, and, placing his ear close to the ground, listened, as he had often done in his old soldiering days, when dreading a night surprise. There was no sound: Ninian was still at the cottage.

Stirling had taken the purse with as little compunction as if he had been stripping a wounded foe on the field of battle—it was simply the result of habit. An old soldier is never unnecessarily cruel. If Nairn had started up while Stirling was easing him of his purse he would have given him the *coup de grace* rather than relinquish his prey; but having obtained all that he could carry

off with safety, his next thought was to do something to restore Nairn to consciousness. No feeling of humanity gave rise to this thought, it was as much the result of habit as his appropriation of the contents of the purse. He proceeded at once to act on it, by drawing from his pocket a flask of excellent Cognac, and, raising Nairn's head, he poured a little into his mouth. He allowed his head to lean back till he had swallowed it, and applied the flask again to his lips. The reviving effects of the strong spirit were soon apparent; Nairn sighed and half-opened his eyes. As soon as Stirling observed this, he returned to his hiding-place behind the wall, where he could see Nairn without being seen.

The latter soon rose to his feet. He stood for a moment as if striving to recall the events of the evening, and then walked away with such a steady pace as showed that he had received no great injury.

Old Mackay's house was about a mile distant; when he reached it he knocked and demanded admission. The miller opened a window on the upper story, and looked cautiously out, with a pistol concealed be-

hind his back ; he was his own banker, and felt little disposed to admit a stranger into his house at such a late hour.

When Nairn discovered that he had stumbled upon the miller's house, the remembrance of what had occurred between him and Ninian would have prevented him from accepting its shelter, if he had been really able to continue his walk to Islayhead ; but he felt weak and faint. The miller could know nothing of what had happened, and would have no objection to allow him to remain in his house during the night.

After the miller's first surprise on discovering who his visitor was, he was prodigal in his offers of hospitality ; a fire of turf was soon kindled from the embers which were still sleeping on the hearth, and a bottle of brandy produced from the miller's cupboard. Nairn drank several glasses in succession, but, contrary to his usual wont, he was so silent and reserved, that the miller observed it and asked if he was well. He made no allusion to his quarrel with Ninian, but said that, while returning from the Castle, where he had dined, he had been taken suddenly ill, and found himself

unable to continue his walk to Islayhead.

The miller made him the offer of a bed, which he accepted; on retiring to his room, he lighted a cigar, and sat down to think over the events of the day. He felt that he had acted foolishly in being rude to Ninian before Marion; she was evidently hurt at his bearing towards her old play-fellow, and it would require the most assiduous attention on his part to regain her good graces.

Of that, however, he did not despair; he had too good an opinion of himself to look upon Ninian in the light of a rival. And then there was this unfortunate quarrel; what would they say at the Castle if they knew that they had been fighting like two drunken sailors? It would create scandal; that scandal must be avoided—it was clearly in his own interests as well as Ninian's that the affair should be kept secret.

And then, was it not strange that he should stumble on the miller's house? That, by the way, was very good brandy; it would be pleasant to have another glass of it. Too late, yes, it was too late, he must wait till to-morrow, and then he could have his tea

chassé, as was the custom of the country.

He knew that this old miller was in the habit of doing a little usury ; it might be convenient to borrow a few hundreds from him. Mowbray's supply was almost exhausted. Iago's advice, "Put money in thy purse," was very good advice to a man with a large balance at his banker's, but sometimes difficult to act on in this impracticable, disobliging world. He must make the miller a handsome present in the morning ; it would be some return for his hospitality, and then such a *douceur* might soften his heart and make him more willing to advance him a loan.

Before settling the amount of the intended *douceur*, Nairn thought it well to examine the contents of his purse. He put his hand into the pocket where he usually carried it, and drew it forth—empty ! It had contained a hundred and five sovereigns—he knew the sum exactly, for it was all that he had left in the world—and a Napoleon which he had brought with him from France. It was all gone ; he could not have lost the money, for the purse was safe in the pocket where he usually carried it.

Who could have taken it? It could be no one but the miller's nephew; he had taken the purse from his pocket while he was insensible, rifled it of its contents, and restored it empty.

He was a mean fellow, certainly, but he would not have taken him to be a thief; however, there was no saying what a man might do under strong temptation—he felt that himself. Mowbray had overlooked his conduct and heaped coals of kindness upon his head; but then Mowbray was a rich young fellow, and could afford to be generous; it was different with a miserable beggar like him, who had always been in difficulties. He was too poor to be able to forgive, and the scoundrel who felled him like an ox had few claims on his consideration.

Could he bring him to justice without his own conduct being exposed? The great point was to secure the heiress; in comparison with that the loss of a hundred pounds was as nothing. If he charged him with robbery he might retaliate by charging him with an assault, and it would never do to have it known that he had been brawling and fighting with a fisherman's son. He

must try to retain Miss Leslie's good graces at any sacrifice.

But still something must be done; he could not live without money, unless he remained a prisoner on board the yacht, and that would scarcely advance his suit with Miss Leslie. He might ask the old miller for an advance, but it was not likely that he would part with his money without good security, and he doubted much whether he could satisfy him on that point. At all events, nothing could be done till morning—he would sleep over the matter, and some bright idea might occur to him during his sleep. He had been in worse difficulties than this before now, and had always found some loophole of escape.

So Nairn lighted another cigar, partly undressed, and threw himself on the bed. He had contracted the habit—a habit only too common among young men of his class—of smoking himself to sleep every night. For the present, we shall leave him enjoying his cigar, and return to Ninian and the schoolmaster.

When Stirling stole the contents of Nairn's purse, his first thought was to avert

suspicion from himself, and he thought that this could best be done by producing positive proof that another was the thief. He was at some distance when he heard the voices quarrelling, and he had no difficulty in recognizing Ninian's, which was perfectly familiar to him. When he came up and found Nairn stretched insensible upon the ground, he never doubted for a moment that Ninian had been his assailant, though he was at a loss to conceive what motive he could have had for attacking the young nobleman. His knowledge of Ninian's character led him to infer that he had gone in search of assistance, and would soon return; as we have already mentioned, he lost no time in gaining possession of the contents of Nairn's purse.

It was a clear, bright, moonlight night, and he dropped the Napoleon on the ground, in the expectation that Ninian would see it and pick it up. He intended at first to have left Nairn till Ninian came to his assistance, and to allow them to settle about the robbery in whatever way they chose; in this way he would not appear in the matter at all, and he might thus avoid

all danger of suspicion. But a second idea occurred to him, after he had restored Nairn to consciousness; he would wait till Ninian returned, he would watch till he saw him stoop down to pick up the Napoleon, and then pounce upon him in the very act. He would thus be able to appear as a witness, and to swear that he had found Ninian with some of the stolen money in his possession. He arrived at this resolution without the smallest compunction; he had no personal dislike to Ninian, but he was a convenient victim, and he had no scruples about sacrificing him to secure his own safety.

Ninian was stooping down, and held the Napoleon in his hand, when Stirling grasped him by the arm. When he turned round to see who his assailant was, he still retained possession of the piece of gold.

"That was a piece of gold, master Ninian," said Stirling. "I saw it sparkling on the ground before you picked it up. Where there is one piece there are likely to be others; but, perhaps, you have already picked them up. I hope that *en bon camarade*, you will be disposed to share with me."

Ninian assured him that this was the only piece he had found; they searched the ground carefully, but, as Stirling well knew beforehand, no more Napoleons could be found. Stirling took the coin and examined it carefully.

"This is not a British coin," he said; "it must belong to some one who has been in France—perhaps to Miss Leslie."

Ninian hesitated for a moment whether he should tell Stirling all that had occurred; it was evident that he knew nothing as yet of the encounter between him and Nairn. He was really at a loss to know what to do; Nairn had disappeared, and he knew not what amount of injury he might have received, or what evil consequences might ensue to himself from having struck the blow. He had always been disposed to believe Stirling to be his friend, and he resolved to tell him all the events of the evening, and to ask his advice.

Stirling listened to him with great gravity to the close. When he had ended, he said to him with a serious air—

"Are you aware that, by the law of Scotland, you are liable to have your right

hand cut off for having struck a nobleman?"

This belief is general among the peasantry in Scotland; it may be a relic of the old barbarous times when some such cruel law was really to be found in the statute book. Ninian had heard that this severe penalty might be inflicted.

"But surely," he said, "it could never be done at the present day in my case, as I only struck him in self-defence?"

"There were no witnesses, and a nobleman's word will have more weight than yours. My advice to you is to keep out of the way for some time. Lord Nairn has not received any severe injury; he had only been stunned, and on recovering his consciousness he has returned to his yacht. He will do nothing to-night, it is too late, but to-morrow he will have you apprehended and committed to prison on the charge of having assaulted him. It would be dangerous for you to retain that coin in your possession, as he may charge you with having robbed him as well as assaulted him. The best thing you can do is to write a letter, enclosing the coin, and to express your regret at what

has occurred. There is a schooner to sail at an early hour to-morrow for Norway; you can easily get on board as a passenger, and remain away till the matter has blown over. In a few months Nairn will have left Islayhead, and all will be forgotten."

Ninian had every reason to believe Stirling to be a disinterested adviser, and in the present state of his feelings he was not averse to leaving the country for a time. He foresaw that Nairn would sooner or later be accepted by Marion, or, if not Nairn, some other suitor of the same rank; he felt that it would be gross presumption on his part to aspire to the hand of one who seemed to belong to a different world, and to have retained little or nothing of that Marion of whom he had fondly dreamed. All these dreams were gone now—a hard, bare, realistic world lay before him, stripped of all its illusions; he would go forth and do his part manfully; but all the charm of existence—the halo of hope with which his fond imagination had encircled the future—had disappeared. The sooner he was gone the better, and it mattered little where he went. He agreed to accompany Stirling

to his cottage, and to write a letter to Nairn, enclosing the Napoleon ; but he would not consent to offer any apology, as what he had done was done in self-defence. Stirling was pleased that he had carried his point so easily, and as the apology was not essential to his schemes, he was satisfied that Ninian should write and return the Napoleon.

This conversation had taken place while they were standing on the spot where Nairn had been struck down. Stirling's house was at the outskirts of the village of Loanhead, which was about two miles distant. The road passed near to the miller's house, which stood in a hollow, and could not be seen till they were close upon it. They walked on for some time in silence ; each was too much engrossed with his own thoughts to feel any desire to talk, or to take much notice of surrounding objects. It was only when they reached a rising ground, which overlooked the hollow in which Mackay's house stood, that Stirling suddenly exclaimed, "The miller's house is on fire !"

Ninian suddenly started from his reverie and looked in the direction of his uncle's

house. A thin, narrow column of smoke rose from the spot where it stood; there was not a breath of wind, and the fire had not yet burst forth with all its irresistible fury. Occasionally a lurid flame shot up for a moment in the column of smoke, and then disappeared; no time was to be lost, it might be already too late to arrest the progress of the fire.

Stirling looked upon the sight with perfect composure; habit had rendered him callous to such scenes. He had followed in the track of a retreating army, and seen hundreds of cottages in flames, and their miserable inhabitants perishing with hunger and cold; it was nothing to him if the miserly old miller was smoked to death like a beast of prey in its lair. He turned to Ninian, and coolly remarked, "A good thing for you. You are his heir, I believe?"

Ninian looked up into his companion's face, and read his character at once. Those few careless words enabled him to know him better than all the intercourse of previous years, and from that moment he began to suspect him. He remembered having seen a tall figure near the spot

where Nairn fell; it must have been Stirling. Had he robbed Nairn and made away with his body? Had he dropped the gold coin while rifling his purse, and advised him to flee that he might divert suspicion from himself? All these thoughts flashed through Ninian's mind in an instant; but, without waiting to make any reply to his companion's question, he rushed forward in the direction of his uncle's house. The school-master followed at a much more leisurely pace.

As the house stood in a hollow, Ninian could not see what progress the fire had made till he was close to it. It was an old house, built partly of granite and partly of wood—the fragments of ships which had been drifted ashore. Ninian knew that his uncle slept in the lower part of the house, which was built of stone, and that his old house-keeper, the only other member of his family, slept in a small room which had been built at one of the ends, but did not communicate with the house. The miller was so suspicious that he did not even trust the old woman who had served him faithfully for more than thirty years. The windows were protected with strong oaken shutters,

which he closed carefully every night himself, and which were sufficient to protect the house from any attack from without.

Ninian found a small crowd of the neighbours standing round the house, and more bent on discussing the origin of the fire, and its probable consequences, than on taking any steps to arrest its progress. The only person who seemed really anxious about the miller's fate was poor old Ailie, his housekeeper, to whom, it was said, he had been far from being the kindest of masters; she wrung her hands and wept in the bitterness of her heart, as she found that all her appeals to the spectators to try to save her master were in vain. Ignorant people, on such occasions, have only hands to work, but they require a head to direct them; most of them, also, were indebted to the miller, and some of them may have been tempted to regard the fire as a providential arrangement to pay off old scores, with which it would be *uncanny* to interfere.

The old woman's courage was revived on seeing Ninian; to his hurried inquiries she answered that she had been awoke about an

hour before by a feeling of suffocation, and, on starting up, found her room full of smoke. She made her way to the door, and on reaching the open air, discovered that the fire was not in her room, but in the upper part of the house. The flames had not yet burst forth, but she could see their glare against the window of the bed-room in the upper story. She lost no time in alarming the neighbours, one of whom had started for Islayhead to obtain assistance, while the rest had striven in vain to rouse the miller, who was supposed to be still asleep. Ailie did not know that there was anyone in the house but her master. Nairn had been admitted without her knowledge.

Ninian's first effort was to break open the door, which was of oak, and secured within by several bolts and bars. It resisted all his attempts to break it open; he left it, and went to the window of the room where he knew his uncle slept. He listened if he could hear anything within, but there was no sound. The miller was probably already suffocated with the smoke.

He borrowed a stick from one of the bystanders, and broke the glass of the window,

and then, applying his ear to the shutter, he heard his uncle say,—

“Tak’ care o’ the glass, it cost siller.”

It was satisfactory to know that he was still alive, but there was no time to be lost. The flames, which had originated in the upper part of the house, were spreading rapidly, and might soon reach his room. The difficulty was to break through the strong oaken shutter, which was strongly secured. After a brief search, he found a large wooden beam, and with the assistance of Stirling and two others, used it as a sort of battering-ram against the door.

After repeated blows, they were obliged to give up all hope of breaking it open, and they then turned their attention to the window, which was about eight feet from the ground. The difficulty was to reach it with the beam; but Stirling’s former campaigning experience here stood them in good stead. He made them bring the table from old Ailie’s room, and place it opposite the window; he and his three assistants then mounted upon it, and brought the beam to bear against the shutter. For a considerable time it resisted their blows,

but at length it gave way, and Ninian, followed by Stirling, leaped into the room.

The room was so dark and full of smoke that they could not distinguish any object ; but they were attracted to the spot where the miller lay by his groans. He was not in bed, but stretched out on the floor ; they raised him in their arms, and carried him to the window, that he might breathe the fresh air. The spectators received him in their arms, and carried him to some distance from the house ; he was not insensible, but his mind seemed to be wandering. Stirling was soon by his side and produced his flask ; a draught of brandy soon revived the miller, who asked if Lord Nairn was safe.

At first they supposed he was labouring under some delusion, but they soon changed their opinion when he informed them, in the most circumstantial manner, how Nairn had come to his house and received shelter for the night. Ninian and Stirling were at once satisfied that Nairn was still in the house ; but when the miller told them which room he occupied, they almost despaired of his being still alive, as that was the room against which Ninian had seen the glare of

the flames as he approached the house.

Ninian, with the events of the evening fresh in his remembrance, was seized with something of a remorseful feeling, and formed at once the generous resolve to risk his own life in attempting to save that of the young nobleman.

Without mentioning his design to anyone he mounted on the table and disappeared through the window. The miller half rose from the ground, as if he wished to detain him, but fell back again with a groan; he had injured one of his legs so much that he could neither walk nor stand.

Every part of the miller's house was familiar to Ninian, so that, though half suffocated with the smoke, he had no difficulty in finding his way to Nairn's room. The heat was almost intolerable, and he knew, by the crackling sound within, that the room was on fire. He knocked at the door, and shouted his name, but there was no answer. He tried to open it, but it was bolted; he kicked at it desperately, and rushed at it with his shoulder, but it was all in vain. He hurriedly retraced his steps, and escaped through the window. The

people gathered around him to learn the result, but it was some time before he was able to speak.

Though baffled in his first attempt, he was resolved to make another effort to rescue Nairn, dead or alive. He knew how dangerous it would be to enter the room from without; the rush of air into the room would cause the flames to spread with greater rapidity, and might endanger his own life. Still he was determined to make the effort, and, with the assistance of some of the bystanders, brought a ladder, and placed it against the wall under the window of Nairn's room. On mounting it he found that he could not reach Nairn's window; the ladder was too short by several feet. He descended slowly, hopeless and despairing. It appeared that nothing more could be done.

At this juncture Stirling came to his assistance. The old soldier's blood was up, and he was ready to undertake any risk, not from any humane feeling, but from the pure love of excitement. He patted Ninian on the back encouragingly, and said,

“Do not lose heart, my boy. I admire your courage, and will give you what help

I can. Follow me slowly up the ladder."

Stirling mounted the ladder, followed by Ninian. When he reached the last step he found that his tall figure was close to the window, though not near enough to enable him to force an entrance.

"Steady there below," he shouted. "Hold the ladder tight, as you value our lives. Now, Ninian, you are an old sailor, and know how to climb; I will hold on by the ledge of the window with both hands, while you mount upon my shoulders, and force an entrance.

It was a perilous undertaking, but Ninian did not hesitate for a moment. Stirling stood firm as a rock, and as cool as if he had been waiting to receive the enemy's charge. Ninian clasped him round the waist, and soon reached his shoulders; fortunately the window was not protected by shutters like those on the ground floor, and he had no difficulty in breaking the glass. The walls of the room, being of wood, were partially consumed, but the bed on which Nairn lay, being of iron, was left uninjured. As soon as the glass was broken, and the fresh air entered the room, the fire burst forth with

greater fury than before; the flames licked Ninian's face, and almost made Stirling relax his hold. He could see Nairn lying on the bed enclosed in a circle of flame, but his clothes were not on fire. He leaped into the room, and the floor almost gave way beneath his weight. He reached the bed, seized Nairn in his arms as if he had been a little child, and carried him to the window. Stirling descended the ladder a few steps to make way for Ninian, who still held Nairn in his arms; he left him for a moment on the ledge of the window, till his feet had reached the first steps, when, supported by Stirling, he again raised him up and carried him in safety to the ground.

A loud cheer rent the air, in which none joined more heartily than those who had at first derided the attempt as an act of madness. So long as the excitement lasted, Ninian was unconscious of the injury he had received, but the moment he reached the ground he staggered and fell—he had fainted.

He was carried into old Ailie's room, who poured water on his face, which soon restored him to consciousness. His face and his hands were much burnt, but he was far

from being in a dangerous state ; if fever did not ensue, he would soon be able to leave his bed, though it was probable that he would bear the marks of the burns on his face through life.

Our old friend the doctor had been attracted to the spot by the report of the fire, and leaving the miller, one of whose legs was fractured, employed all his skill in restoring Nairn to consciousness. After a time his efforts were successful ; he had been rendered insensible by the smoke, and was not aware of the danger to which he had been exposed, till he awoke and found himself in the doctor's hands. When he learned that he owed his life to Ninian's intrepidity, and that the latter had forced his way into the room when all others despaired of his safety, he betrayed more emotion than might have been expected from a man of his character, and requested to be conducted to the place where Ninian lay. He shook him warmly by the hand, and said,—

“ I behaved to you like a scoundrel, and you have saved my life. I should be a still greater scoundrel if I ever forgot all that I owe to you this night.”

Nairn had not forgotten that he had been robbed of his money, nor had he ceased to suspect that Ninian was the thief, but he was a man of strong though transient emotions. He felt a generous glow of gratitude to the man who had risked his own life to save his, and deemed his money of little consequence when compared with the debt which he owed him, and which he could never repay. He resolved that no one should ever learn from his lips the events of that evening, and that Ninian should never be accused by him of having taken his money, though he was convinced in his own mind that he had done so. If Nairn had possessed more insight into human nature, he might well have doubted whether Ninian would have rescued him from the flames, when his death would have destroyed all chance of detection, and obliterated every trace of his crime; but he had once adopted the belief that Ninian was the guilty party, and his subsequent conduct had not changed his opinion.

The wooden part of the miller's house, and all his furniture, were destroyed; but he lost nothing, as they were insured at more

than their value. He had taken this precaution in consequence of threats used against him by some of the victims of his usurious practices, and he believed to the last that the fire was the work of an incendiary. Perhaps Nairn's cigar had something more to do with it ; but that prudent young nobleman kept his own counsel.

CHAPTER III.

NINIAN, after two days, was removed to his father's cottage. The injuries he had received the night of the fire were more serious than was imagined, and resulted in a sharp attack of fever, which confined him to his bed for about a fortnight. Owing to the skilful treatment of the doctor, his face was not disfigured, and he was comforted with the assurance that he would soon be as well as ever.

Stormy Jack was proud of the achievements of his son, and received, with quiet complacency, the congratulations of his comrades on his bravery. He confessed to his wife that he was beginning to fear that Ninian's studies had softened his mind, and deprived him of that hardy and daring courage for which the Kynochs had always been noted; his recent conduct had reassured him, and convinced him that he

was worthy of the name he bore, and the character he had earned in early youth.

Mrs. Kynoch's imagination was excited by the fact of her son having saved the life of a nobleman; she thought that he was now certain to receive a presentation to some eligible charge, as soon as he was licensed. Her ambition did not extend beyond this, the great desire of her life being to live to see Ninian "shak' his pow in a poopit," as she quaintly expressed it.

Alice said little, but she sat by his bedside like a ministering angel, and by a thousand little acts of kindness, such as a woman alone can perform, alleviated his sufferings, and relieved the tedium of the sick-room. She read to him from his favourite authors, cooled his brow, and often prayed by his bedside. There was a closer intimacy between them than there had been before; sickness had softened his heart, and led him to take a different view of life, with all its aims, and objects, and aspirations, from what he had ever done before.

One day he said to his sister,—

"Alice, I do not think that I shall ever be a minister."

“Why, Ninian?”

“I do not feel myself qualified for that sacred office.”

“I look upon that feeling of personal unfitness as a good sign. It will lead you to a more earnest application to Him who alone can impart that fitness, which no man, however great may be his talents or his learning, possesses naturally.”

“I know what you mean, Alice, but I think that I have been acting from a wrong motive all along. It was you who first inspired me with the ambition of being a scholar. I do not blame you; you saw how miserable I was, and you suggested the only plan which could give me a shadow of hope. I know how difficult it is to detect the sophistry of the passions, and if I had not been left utterly helpless, I might never have regarded the matter in this light. I had set my heart on an earthly idol, and it is now about to be taken from me, and I may well say with the despoiled idolator, ‘What have I left?’ Nothing but the conviction of my own folly and the justice of my punishment.”

“Would it be right to give up all

thoughts of the ministry now, because you know that you have been hitherto aspiring to that sacred office from an unworthy motive? Might you not, in some measure, atone for the unworthiness of that motive, by devoting yourself now to your Master's work, from pure love to Him and to human souls?"

"Yes, Alice, if I could only do so; but at this moment I feel little love for Him, and none for human souls. My heart only knoweth its own bitterness; I know it is very bad, and very selfish, and very wrong to feel thus; but I must not conceal the truth, however much it may tell against myself."

"You are ill, Ninian, and your illness has given a gloomy tinge to all your thoughts and feelings, which will pass away with renewed health. God has much work for you yet to do in the world, while mine is ended almost before it is begun. But it is His will, and I must not repine."

"Yes, Alice, there *is* work for me to do yet in the world, but not of the kind you think. The sedentary life of a minister would soon kill me; I long for the sea, the

dear old sea. Open the window that I may hear its roar—ah! its voice is like music to me; it seems to welcome me back to its bosom as a father might welcome a wandering son to his former home. Yes, Alice, I must return to my former life. I want change of scenery, change of employment, and change of mental occupation. After a voyage or two at sea I shall be myself again!”

Alice, perceiving that his resolve to return to the sea was a fixed idea, ceased to combat it. She knew that the sailor, condemned to live on land, soon longs for his former life—just as the soldier, condemned to live in times of peace, longs for war, with all its dangers and excitement. After the confession, also, which Ninian had volunteered, she felt that it would be wrong to urge him to undertake duties which can only be properly discharged by those who love them for their own sake, apart from any other consideration, and she believed that a sea voyage would weaken the remembrance of his great sorrow, and give a healthier tone to his mind.

After the fire, the miller never left the

ruins of his house; he lived and slept in his housekeeper's room, and superintended the workmen who were employed in clearing away the *débris* and rebuilding the walls. He never lost sight of them for a moment; but this was thought quite natural by those who knew his character; it was supposed that he was anxious to get the good of his money, and to extract as much labour from them as he could. Some surprise, however, was excited when he was found, by some of his neighbours at a late hour, meditating like a second Marius, among the ruins, and watching over what had once been the habitation of his *lares* and *penates*.

The reader need feel no surprise, nor prepare himself for some dread mystery, as we are about to confide to him the secret of the miller's watchfulness, and to explain the cause of the accident which had befallen him. He possessed a practical knowledge of finance, which enabled him to turn his money to the best account; and instead of allowing it to remain in any bank, he lent it out among his poorer neighbours, at a rate of interest more proportioned to the pressure of their necessities than the actual

value of the benefit conferred. It was understood that he never kept a large sum of money in his house; he had too high an opinion of its fructifying powers, when prudently invested, to leave it unused in his coffers; but still he had always some money in hand, as well as the securities and bills of those who were his debtors.

No one knew where these were kept—not even old Ailie, his housekeeper. That venerable servant had never once been allowed to enter his bedroom, the door of which was always carefully locked when he went out, and though it was suspected that he kept his money there, no one had any direct evidence of the fact.

On the night of the fire, when the miller parted with Nairn and went to his bedroom, he did not at once go to sleep. He placed the candle on a small rickety table, and, guided by its uncertain light, knelt down before his bed. It was an attitude of devotion and worship, but there was nothing of piety in the act; he slowly and with some difficulty dragged from beneath the bed a heavy iron coffer, and taking a key from his pocket, opened it. He drew from it a

bag of gold, which he counted out carefully on the table, and then replaced in the bag. After this he examined several papers, and noted in a day-book certain particulars connected with them, no doubt to refresh his memory. The coffer was then locked, and, after pushing it beneath the bed, the miller went to sleep.

He could not tell how long he had slept when he was awake by a feeling of suffocation, and starting up found the room full of smoke. He at once divined the cause, and his first thought, was not to save his own life or Nairn's, but to place the iron coffer beyond the reach of the flames. He knew that the gold which it contained was safe, but there was a danger that it might become so heated that all his papers would be destroyed. He cared nothing for the house and furniture, as they were already insured beyond their value, or for the young nobleman who was sleeping beneath his roof—his only thought was how to secure the coffer and its contents. If the papers were destroyed, he could have no means of recovering his money from those to whom he had lent it, and the flames would assuredly

reach the coffer if left where it now was.

Old Mackay had for many years been engaged in the smuggling trade, and though he had taken care not to expose himself to the risks, he had shared largely in the profits of that illicit traffic. A secret cellar had been constructed in his house for the reception of smuggled goods, access to which was obtained by raising a stone slab which formed part of the floor. He raised this slab without difficulty, and, seizing the coffer, dragged it towards the cellar. He succeeded in lowering it to the bottom, and was about to replace the slab when he thought that he heard Nairn descending the stairs. It was only the crackling of the flames, but in his anxiety to close the entrance and avoid detection, he lost his balance and fell to the bottom of the cellar. One of his legs was fractured, and it was with the greatest difficulty, and after much painful suffering, that he was at length enabled to crawl to the top and close the door. All his efforts to open the door of the house, or unbolt the shutters were unavailing; overpowered with heat, and smoke, and physical pain, he fell to the ground in a half-consci-

ous state, and would have fallen a victim to the flames, and his own cupidity, if Ninian had not opportunely come to his assistance.

Ninian had lost much in the miller's estimation by refusing his consent to a secret marriage with Marion, before she knew that she was the heiress of Inverchewan. He had not risen in his good graces by becoming a scholar, or wishing to prepare himself for the ministry; he had not much respect for any of the learned professions, except the less scrupulous legal practitioners, whom he secretly admired, but he had a profound contempt for ministers, "a set of lazy fellows, who live by selling wind," as he irreverently expressed it.

After the fire, a re-action set in in Ninian's favour; his praise was in the mouths of all men, and the miller could not but feel something of gratitude to one who had saved his life. The iron coffer, with its contents, was safe, and the only real injury he had received was the fractured limb, which he lamented, not so much from the physical pain, as from the doctor's bill which it entailed. He seldom spoke of Ninian, but when he did his words, though few, were significant.

“How is Ninian to day?” he inquired of Stormy Jack, who had come to see him a few days after the fire.

“He is a little feverish, but the doctor says he is doing well. I wish we had him up and out at sea again. The smell of the salt water would do him more good than all the doctor’s stuff.”

“Ah, well, tell him that old Adam Mackay, the miller, has not forgotten who carried him through the smoke and the fire that awful night. Money cannot repay such an act as that, and I have little money to spare if it could; so I’ll not offer Ninian ony siller. But the lad is my own kith and kin, blood is thicker than water, and he may live to find some day that his uncle was not the worst friend he had in the world.”

Whatever friendly intentions the miller may have cherished towards Ninian after his decease, he was evidently resolved to make the most of Stormy Jack so long as he was alive. As soon as he was able to be out, he contrived to limp down every day to Loanhead, and to find himself in the Kynochs’ cottage about the dinner hour,

and, when invited to partake, seated himself at the table and partook of the plain but abundant meal.

“Well, well, Alice,” he would say, “since ye wish it, I’ll no’ refuse. No, no, I like the crumbs best; ‘broken bread maks haile bairns.’ I am almost ashamed to be dining here every day; but that stupid body Ailie has got so awfully jumbled in her judgment since the fire, that she cannot cook a decent bit of victuals for me. It is well that little sairs me.”

While the miller professed to be thus easily “saired,” or served, he showed by the way he plied his spoon that he enjoyed an excellent appetite, as well he might, his share of the Kynochs’ dinner being the only regular meal he enjoyed in the course of the day. How old Ailie lived was a mystery to all, and yet she was sincerely attached to the master who starved her, and would not have left him on any consideration.

When the miller entered Ninian’s room, he seldom referred to the fire or the debt of gratitude he owed him; but, on one or two occasions, he threw out the same significant

hints about his future intentions which he had already given to Stormy Jack. For his intentions, present or future, Ninian cared little; he had saved his life without any expectation of reward, and any reward he could confer had little attraction for him now. He longed to be up and doing, not from the desire of wealth or fame or greatness, but that he might forget the past in the intensity of present action, and thus escape from himself.

The miller usually contrived to be near the shore when Stormy Jack returned from fishing. He showed a deep and not altogether disinterested desire to know what success had attended his labours during the day, and Stormy Jack would good-naturedly spread out before him all the fish he had taken. The miller would select the largest, and begin to descant upon the beauties of the piscine creation in general, and of this specimen in particular; he would admire the shape of its head, its mouth, its fins, its tail, and dilate on its other good qualities, till the fisherman, who divined his thoughts, would say, good-naturedly, that since he admired the fish so

much, he had better take it home and make old Ailie cook it for his supper.

The miller would briefly mutter his thanks, and seem for a moment to hesitate. His eye had fallen on another, the next largest to the one he had first selected. He would raise it up deftly and admiringly in his hand, and slowly balance the one against the other.

"Now, if I were called upon to decide, I could not, for the life of me, say which is the finer fish of the two. They are beauties, both of them!"

"Oh, never mind, miller. There is six in the one and half-a-dozen in the other. You had better take them both with you, and then get Ailie to decide."

"Aweel, aweel, since you insist on it, I'll no' refuse. A wilful man must have his way. Ailie will be a proud woman to-night on seeing two such fine fish in the house; and that reminds me that you and your wife and Ninian, when he is able, must come and dine with me some day soon."

"We'll see, we'll see," said Stormy Jack, who had received the same invitation at any time during the last thirty years, and

knew that the "some day soon" would be a distant day indeed. The miller would then limp off with his fish, admiring in his heart the innocence and simplicity of his brother-in-law.

The miller was a considerable gainer by the fire, an event which he had been anticipating for many years. Several of his neighbours had been ruined through borrowing money from him; when the period of payment came, and they were unable to meet their engagements, no appeal for time or mercy ever produced any effect upon his obdurate heart: he sold them up without compunction, and usually profited by their ruin. Curses, not loud but deep, were uttered against him by those who had been his victims; but the miller cared little for their feelings towards him, so long as he increased his wealth. There was only one man whom he dreaded, and whose threats had induced him to insure his property; a quiet, honest, hard-working man, who had had recourse to him for a small loan during sickness in his family. The money was advanced to him, but as the sickness continued in his family he was unable

to pay it when due, and the miller sold all his furniture, not excepting even the miserable bed on which his sick wife and newly-born child lay. A neighbour received them into his house, but they both died, and the heart-broken man swore, in his despair, that he would be avenged on their destroyer. Years had elapsed since he uttered this threat, which had been forgotten by all who heard it except the miller, who, bearing it in mind, had insured his property, and hated bitterly the man who had forced him to this course.

Before the amount for which the property was insured was paid, an investigation was made with reference to the cause of the fire. Mackay either thought this a good opportunity to be avenged on the man whom he had ruined, or really believed that the fire was the work of his hands. When examined, therefore, as to whether he had any reason to suspect any one, he mentioned his name and the threats which he had uttered against him. The poor man was apprehended and detained in custody for some time, but as no evidence could be adduced against him, the miller's sus-

picious passed for nothing, and he was dismissed. As his property was insured for nearly double its value, he was a gainer by the speculation, and his profits consoled him for the slight limp which was the result of his accident.

Ninian's conduct on the night of the fire was long the theme of admiration among the neighbouring villages, and his fame even extended to more distant parts. Mr. Hamilton, in a letter to the Secretary of the Royal Humane Society, gave a description of Ninian's successful efforts to save two lives at the risk of his own; and the Committee, at their next meeting, bestowed on him a gold medal, to mark their sense of his noble conduct. Stormy Jack had formerly received a medal for saving human life during the storms with which that part of the coast is visited every year, and the people of Loanhead were justly proud that father and son should both have merited the same honourable distinction.

None admired Ninian's bravery more than Marion Leslie. She did not know the whole of the provocation which Nairn had given him, on the day when they dined at the

Castle, but she had not forgotten his rudeness in the boat, and the remembrance of it deepened her admiration of Ninian's conduct. She felt that he must be a good as well as a brave man, to have risked his own life to save Nairn's, and she was proud of her old playfellow. She wrote a short note to Ninian; in which she expressed these feelings with all the generous warmth of her impulsive nature. Ninian knew that she would not have written to him so freely if she had loved him, but he would not have parted with her little note for the world; he kept it beside him all the time of his illness, and he never parted with it in after life.

Marion sent every day to inquire about him, and the servant usually brought some present of fruit or flowers and a note for Alice. When Ninian was sufficiently recovered to leave his room, she called one day to see him. When he was told that she was in the house, he dreaded to meet her, more than he had dreaded to meet the flames and the smoke in his uncle's house. And yet Marion did not look at all a formidable object, as with charming frankness she

grasped his hand, and told him how proud she was of his conduct, and how glad she was to see him recovering. All this was said with perfect ease and evident sincerity, but there was nothing, in her tone or manner, of that diffidence and reserve which she would have shown in the presence of one whom she loved. Ninian observed this, and was glad that he had never told his love. He resolved that his secret should remain with himself. He would thus save Marion much pain, and there was no sacrifice he was not prepared to make for her sake.

If Ninian had thrown himself at her feet and told her the great secret of his life, would his appeal to her heart have been without any effect? It might have moved her to pity and to tears, but her answer would have been the answer of many a one similarly situated: "Too late." Marion was not selfish, few of her sex are so unless they have imbibed false principles from the society in which they move; she was capable of making any sacrifice for one whom she loved, and if she had known Ninian's romantic feelings towards her, before she met

Nairn, her heart might have been touched by the simple story of his love ; and if she had once loved him, she would have cared little whether she had to stoop to his position, or he was elevated to hers. A true-hearted woman is ever proud to enrich the man whom she truly loves with all she possesses, or, if she has no wealth, she is proud to share his poverty.

She knew that Ninian was a braver and better man than Nairn—the conduct of the latter had given her some insight into his character ; but she did not cease to love him on that account. He often confessed his faults, and admitted that his past life had not been free from errors, but he knew that, with Marion for his wife, he would be a changed man. Such reasoning is not unusual among men of Nairn's character ; whether it be true or not, those who have listened to it are best capable of judging, but it would be a dangerous experiment for any young lady to marry a rake or a profligate in the hope of reforming him. "It might be a dangerous experiment for most young ladies, but not for *me*." It was thus that Marion reasoned, as she looked in her mirror, and thought of

the excellent system of *morale* taught at the Maison Royale of St. Denis.

In the course of their conversation Ninian told her that he was about to leave Loanhead, perhaps for ever. As he told her this he watched her face. It expressed surprise and regret, but no deeper or more tender emotion.

“To leave Loanhead for ever! Why, what are you going to do? Not to turn missionary, I hope? M. Belouard, the *directeur* of the young ladies at the Maison Royale, went as a missionary to the Feejee Islands, and the savages ate him, as Madame told us, without the intermediate process of cooking. Think how shocking it would be if the same fate awaited you.”

Ninian assured her that there was no danger, as he had not sufficient love for the amiable Feejians to expose himself to a similar fate. He was about to return to the sea, which he hoped would prove kinder to him than those unsophisticated savages had been to the poor *curé*.

Here their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the miller, and Marion rose to depart. The miller took off his hat

and bowed to her with the appearance of profound respect, but Marion shrank from him with an instinctive feeling of dislike which she could not explain. She had not forgotten that he was the cause of her visits to Stormy Jack's cottage being discontinued before she departed for France, through his rudeness to her uncle; she remembered how she had always disliked his old shrivelled face and crabbed ways when she was a child, and she suspected that there was as much sarcasm as respect in the outward appearance of profound respect which he had now assumed. She therefore shortened her visit, and, after shaking hands with Alice and Ninian, passed the miller with a haughty inclination of the head, entered her carriage, and drove off. Ninian stood at the window and looked after her as long as the carriage was in sight, while the miller watched him with a cynical expression of face, like an unamiable old Mephistopheles, as he was.

With a half-sigh Ninian left the window, and returned to his seat.

"Ah, you may sigh," said the miller, "it is too late now, but if you had taken my

advice you might have been riding at her side, with all the flunkeys at Inverchewan at your beck and call."

"Do you think I could have been happy, uncle, if I had been guilty of acting on your base proposal?"

"There would have been nothing base in marrying the lassie, before she learned that she was a grand heiress, and began to hold her head so high. All is fair in love and war, you know. After marriage she would have forgiven you; there is nothing which a woman will not forgive to a man whom she loves."

"That may be, but I could never have forgiven myself. I should have lost my own self-respect, and no amount of money can compensate for that loss."

The miller laughed scornfully at these words, and then said,

"A man who has plenty of money will never lose his own respect, or that of others. Money is like charity, it covers a multitude of sins. 'The rich man getteth himself many friends, while the poor man is despised of his own neighbour.' *There*, that is Scripture for you. Look at me, an old, shrivelled

wretch, with one foot in the grave and no living ties to bind me to life, with few to care for me, and none to lament me. Well, I am happier than you with all your romantic ideas and fine feelings. You have lost the object of your heart's desire, because you were too scrupulous to grasp it when within your reach; and now, like a spoiled child, which has thrown its toy into the river, you weep because it is no longer yours. But I have acted a wiser and more consistent part. I have set my heart upon money. I have made gold my god. I have toiled for it, and worshipped it for many years, and the love of it has made time pass by with the swiftness of an arrow. I shall only be sorry to leave this world because I cannot take my money with me, or live to add to it; but in this world I have never had any reason to regret my choice. Money has done all for me which I ever expected it to do."

"All the money you have would not have saved your life, if I had not come to your aid."

"Ay, lad, but would you have come to my aid so readily, if it had not been for my money? If I had been an old beggar

without a plack, would you have risked your life to save mine ? ”

“ I should not have hesitated to do so. ”

“ Then the greater fool you ! I thought you had more sense. What matters it whether a beggar die in a ditch or in a burning house ? His life is useless to anyone, and a burden to himself. It would have been a good thing for you if that young lord, who is little better than a beggar, had been left to perish in the flames. ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Do you ask why, when you know that he has supplanted you in Marion Leslie’s affections, and will soon carry her off as his bride ? ”

“ Not supplanted me, uncle, for I have no reason to believe that she ever loved me. Nairn is not the man to make her happy, but it would be folly for me to aspire to her hand. She is no longer the Marion whom I loved ; she belongs to a different world. ”

“ If you had not saved my life, I would call you a chicken-hearted fellow. Are you not as good as the lassie ? You may count kin with her any day. The Kynochs have as good blood in their veins as the Leslies—

but you happen to be poor, while she is rich. That is the great difficulty, but I think it may be got over. I know an old man with enough money to make his nephew a match worthy of the laird of Inverchewan's niece."

"Your money would be of no use in this case, uncle."

"My money of no use?" cried the miller, while his eyes sparkled with indignation, as an idolater's might do on hearing his favourite idol despised; "my money of no use! That is a fool's saying. Money is always of use. Money can do anything or everything. Money is power, true power, lasting power. What is the use of all your learning to you? Can it put money in your purse, or win for you what you would give all the world to possess? Some penniless idiot has said, 'Knowledge is power;' but I say, Money is power. Suppose that you are knowledge and I am money, and let us take a walk down the street. Why, there is not a man or a woman in the village who will not meet me with a smiling face, and make the most tender inquiries about my health; while they will

pass you by carelessly as a poor student lad who is nothing to them. And why this difference? Is it because they love me? Do you think I am such a fool as not to know that they all hate me, and would dance on my grave if I were buried to-morrow? I know this well, but I know also the secret of my power—it is because I am rich that they bow before me, and because you are poor that they pass you by.”

“But surely, uncle, the outward semblance of respect can give you no pleasure when you know that it is insincere?”

“I accept it for what it is worth—an acknowledgment of the omnipotence of wealth. It may be different in other worlds; but in this little planet of ours wealth is omnipotent. Look at me now; often, I have no doubt, as you have been poring over your books, and rejoicing in the sublime folly which you believed to be wisdom, you have thought what a miserable old creature is my uncle, the miller! Life can have little pleasure for him, living as he does alone, holding no intercourse with the living or the dead, and caring for

nothing but money. Ah! lad, you little know what dreams I have, when I shut up the house at night, and spread out my money before me! Talk of the raptures of a successful lover, the pleasures of the intellect, the blessedness of doing good—all these things are as nothing when weighed in the balance against money! When I look at my money, I say all these things are mine potentially. It is true I live alone, and have none but old Ailie to share my crust of bread; but when I look at my money, I say with this I could make my table groan with luxury, and draw troops of flattering friends around my board. I am a thin, decrepit, old man, with nothing to attract a woman's eye, or to please a woman's fancy; but, when I look at my money, I become radiant with youth and beauty, and proud with the thought that the bonniest lass in the parish could not resist the *glamour* which gold has cast around me. Do not think that I love money for its own sake, I love it as a magician might love his wand—for the power it confers; I love it above all things, because some day it may enable me to gratify my revenge. *May!* nay, it must,

or I have lived in vain, and toiled in vain to acquire it. For more than thirty years I have said to myself at the close of every day, 'Be patient, wait, you are another day nearer to your revenge.' When I have saved a guinea and added it to my secret store, my heart has leaped with joy, because it shortened the time I must wait before I can triumph over the pride of those I have sworn to be avenged on. Ay, the Leslies may drive about with their carriages, their flunkys, and all their grandeur; but the day will come yet when they will bitterly repent that they made old Adam Mackay their enemy."

"Oh! uncle, will you never learn to forgive?"

"Never, so long as breath remains in this body. Shall I forego my resolve to avenge myself on those whose very name I hate?"

"I have never asked any favour from you for myself, and I never intend to do so; but if you feel that my conduct in saving your life gives me any claim upon your gratitude—if the example of Him whose whole life was a lesson of forgiveness, and whose last

words were words of pardon, has any influence upon your heart, struggle against this dark spirit of revenge, and give up all thought of injuring those who have never injured you."

"On one condition I might have pardoned them—if Marion Leslie had become your wife. Your union would have been a healing of the feud, and you would have stood between me and them like their guardian angel, and the fury of my hatred would have been stayed. But it is hard to give up all that you have lived for; and I almost rejoiced when this lordling came to carry off the prize from you, because your disappointment added fresh fuel to my hatred, and I saw in him the instrument of my vengeance. If he marries the heiress, the lands of Inverchewan will soon be in the market, and the Leslies begging their bread from door to door. You are a good lad, Ninian, and when I die, you will find that I have not forgotten who saved my life; but you must not ask me to forgive the Leslies—you might as well ask me not to live."

With these words the miller parted from

Ninian, who felt that nothing which he could say would have any effect in diverting him from his purpose.

CHAPTER IV.

NAIRN remained for some time undecided whether he should take any steps for the recovery of his money, or submit to the loss in silence. Of what had occurred after Ninian struck him, he remained entirely ignorant, except that he had some faint recollection of a flask of brandy having been applied to his lips; when he regained his consciousness he was alone. On returning to the yacht, he told his friend, the commander, all that had happened to him, and asked his advice as to what he should do; the latter was inclined to believe Ninian innocent, as his conduct in saving Nairn's life could scarcely be reconciled with the supposition that he had previously robbed him. If he had robbed him, it was clearly his interest to allow him to perish in the flames, as all traces of his

guilt would thus be removed, and no blame could be attached to him for making no effort to save him. Moreover, the honest-hearted sailor's experience of human nature had led him to the conclusion that a man could not be at once brave and dishonest; a thief was always a coward, and a brave man was always honest.

Nairn blushed deeply as the sailor explained his theory of ethics, which was confirmed by certain events in his own history. He remembered the field of battle, where he had turned his back to the foe, and the gambling-house in London, where he had robbed a friend and a brother officer. The remembrance of his own guilt made him disposed to deal leniently with Ninian, if he should turn out to be the thief; but on that point he had serious doubts.

A few days after the fire, he received a letter from Ninian, enclosing the Napoleon which he had picked up in the presence of the schoolmaster. No allusion was made to Stirling in Ninian's note; he was still too weak to write at any length, and confined himself to the simple statement that, on returning to render Nairn whatever assistance

he could, he found him gone, and the Napoleon lying upon the ground. He now lost no time in returning it, and would have done so before if it had not been for his illness.

Nairn submitted this letter to the commander of the yacht, who regarded it as an additional proof of Ninian's innocence. If he had been guilty, he would not have taken a step which tended directly to criminate himself, by showing that part of the stolen money had been in his possession. Nairn drew a different conclusion from Ninian's act; he thought that he had returned the Napoleon, which he could not dispose of, in order to avert suspicion from himself, and enable him to retain the rest of the money without any risk of discovery.

Full of this idea he ordered a boat, and went ashore to find old McWyllie, the lawyer, of whose astuteness he had formed a high opinion, in consequence of certain bill transactions between them at a former period. He related to him all that occurred on the night in question till Ninian left him, and he discovered his loss at the miller's house. McWyllie listened to him with grave attention, restraining as much as possible

the rotatory movements of his head, and refreshing himself occasionally with a pinch of snuff. Nairn concluded by expressing his belief that Ninian was the thief, and wished to know what steps were to be taken for the recovery of his money ; as he owed his life to him, he wished to avoid any exposure, and would be satisfied if half the money were returned.

McWyllie stroked his chin gently for a minute or two, and then spoke.

“It is a gey kittle case, my lord ; but to my thinking, you are placing the bonnet on the wrong head. I have kent the lad Kynoch since he was a bairn, and I ken him owre weel ever to believe that he is a thief. I am sure that neither judge nor jury would convict him on such evidence, when they know that he saved your life. There is a kind of mystery about the case which I do not quite understand. Do you remember anything of what occurred after you received the blow which stunned you ?”

“When my consciousness returned I found myself alone, and stretched on the ground ; but some one must have been with me before that, as I have a faint recollection of a flask

of brandy having been applied to my lips. It must have been very good brandy too, to judge by the taste which remained in my mouth. I should have no objection to a glass of it at this moment."

McWyllie opened a cupboard, and produced a bottle and a glass, which he filled, and handed to Nairn.

"I cannot offer you brandy, my lord, but here is a glass of whisky strong enough to gar your lugs crack. Shall I ring for some water?"

Nairn shook his head, and emptied the glass at a draught; he was only too much accustomed to these morning libations. He held out the glass to be replenished, but McWyllie, affecting not to see the movement, put aside the bottle, and locked the cupboard.

"I think, my lord, you had better leave this matter in my hands, and call back in a day or two. Have you seen the lad Kynoch since the fire?"

"I have not. He sent back the Napoleon yesterday, but I have not taken any notice of his letter. He owes me a hundred and five pounds, and I owe him my life, so I

suppose I am still his debtor, and had better leave him alone."

"The debt he owes you is very doubtful, but there can be no doubt as to how much you owe him. Here is paper, pen, and ink, sit down and write him a letter of thanks for having saved your life. Say nothing about the Napoleon or the loss of your money. I will call with your letter, and explain all that."

Nairn sat down with a bad grace, and wrote the letter. His pen was far from being the pen of a ready writer, and a letter of thanks was not at all in his line. With a little assistance from McWyllie, the letter was at length completed, and left in his custody.

"I suppose you have got lots of tin in these iron boxes?" said Nairn, looking round the shelves in the office; "suppose you advance me a hundred or two, or do a little bill for me. I am far from being in clover just now."

"Na, na, my lord. I have not forgotten some of our former bill transactions, and burned bairns dread the fire. You are welcome to my legal advice; but I opine

that lending money to you would not be a very safe investment."

"As you like, old six-and-eightpence," said Nairn, lighting a cigar, and sauntering out of the office.

McWyllie summoned the "partan" and ordered him to get Donald and the gig ready. He drove straight to Stormy Jack's cottage, and demanded to see Ninian; he was glad to find that Stormy Jack was not at home, as he still felt somewhat uncomfortable when he thought of their former interview. Mrs. Kynoch was surprised at such a visit, and inquired stiffly what might be the nature of his business with her son, who was still very ill, and unable to leave his bed. McWyllie said that he had a letter and a message from Lord Nairn, both of which must be delivered to him alone. On hearing Lord Nairn's name, Mrs. Kynoch stood aside and invited him to enter; no doubt her hopes were about to be realized—the least that Nairn could do for her son would be to give him the promise of a kirk when he was licensed.

The lawyer gave Ninian Nairn's letter, and while he was reading it, he took time

to consider how he should make known to him the very unpleasant matter which had brought him there. He had known Ninian so long, that he never for a moment entertained the idea that he was guilty; still there were circumstances connected with the events of the evening which Ninian might be able to explain, and thus afford a clue to the discovery of the thief. He was unwilling to wound Ninian's feelings, and to cause him unnecessary pain, by letting him know that Nairn had been so ungenerous as to suspect him, and he came to the conclusion that the best thing he could do was to tell him all that had happened, and to ask him whether he had seen any one near the spot where Nairn fell.

When Ninian had finished the letter, he asked him whether he was aware that Nairn was robbed of a large sum of money on the night of the fire. Ninian told him that he did not know of his loss, as he had not seen him or had any communication with him since that night, except a brief note which he had written, enclosing a Napoleon, which he believed to be his property, and the receipt of which was acknowledged

in the letter which he had just received.

“Well, Ninian, my lad, there is no use beating about the bush. No one who knows you will ever suspect that you took the money, so you need not *fash* your head about that; but I am going to precognosce you, to see if I can find out the thief. I ken about the tuilzie between you and Nairn, and between you and me it was a’ tint that fell by—we’ll let that flee stick to the wa’. Nairn forgives you for breaking his head, in consideration of your courage in saving his life; but he cannot well afford to lose his siller, and is willing to give a liberal reward to any one who will enable him to recover it.”

The suspicion at once flashed across Ninian’s mind that Stirling was the thief. He remembered the cruel, heartless words which he had spoken on discovering the fire in his uncle’s house, and the insight into his character which those words gave him. Still, he had no proof against Stirling, and as he thought of his courage and zeal on the night of the fire, he doubted whether he could have been guilty of such a crime, and determined to state the simple

facts of the case, without intentionally saying anything to criminate the schoolmaster.

"Does Lord Nairn remember anything of what happened to him after I left him? I was only about twenty minutes away, and when I returned he was gone."

"He was so jumbled in the judgment with the blow you gave him, that he does not remember anything very distinctly, except that some one gave him a pull at a flask of brandy, which brought him round, but when he opened his eyes he was alone. Nairn says it was good brandy, and no one is a better judge."

"When did he discover his loss?"

"Not before he had reached your uncle's house, and had been shown by him to his bedroom."

The idea occurred to Ninian that his uncle was suspected of having stolen the money, and he considered himself bound, in justice to him, to tell McWyllie where he had met Stirling.

"Lord Nairn," McWyllie continued, "could not have dropped his money on the spot where he fell, or on the way to your uncle's house, because the purse in which

he always carries it was in his pocket, but the money was gone. Whoever took the money must have done so when he was unconscious. Now, tell me if you saw any one near the spot when you returned to assist Nairn."

"I saw no one at first; but on examining the ground I saw a piece of gold, and on stooping to pick it up I felt myself rudely grasped by the arm, and on turning round I saw Stirling, the schoolmaster, who claimed the half of the money. He may have heard the loud, angry words which passed between us, and been thus attracted to the spot."

"Ah, Ninian, that lang-leggit, land-louping scoundrel is the thief. I see it all now. He overheard your quarrel, saw you strike the blow, and waited till you were gone. He then stole the money, and dropped the Napoleon on the ground, that he might pounce upon you while you were stooping to pick it up, and thus be able to give evidence against you. The Judas villain! I'll take my oath he is ready to come forward and to give evidence against you."

Ninian was silent, and McWyllie continued :—

“Had you any conversation with Stirling on your way to the miller’s house?”

“Yes, I told him about our quarrel, and how I struck Nairn. He said that I was liable to have my right hand cut off for having struck a nobleman, and advised me to return the coin, and to leave the country for a time. I was so influenced by his advice that I intended to have taken my passage in a schooner for Norway; but I knew nothing of the money having been stolen. It was fortunate for me that I did not leave, or my name might have been branded as a thief.”

“He is a clever rogue, that Stirling,” said the lawyer, admiringly; “but he would not be the worse of a little hanging. If Nairn makes no complaint, he will remain silent; but if there is any inquiry, he will come forward to accuse you. Our only plan is to wait and to watch him. There is little gold circulating in Loanhead, and if I should hear of him spending a sovereign, I shall introduce him to the procurator-fiscal.”

When McWyllie left Ninian he went straight to the schoolmaster’s house, and

found Stirling engaged with his usual duties. He gave no signs of uneasiness when the lawyer told him that he wished to have a little private conversation with him on a subject of some importance, but politely informed him that his time was at his disposal. As he did not wish that their interview should take place in the presence of Jacqueline, and the school-room was the only apartment where they could meet without interruption, he dismissed the school, and the children rushed forth with a shout of delight at having thus unexpectedly regained their liberty.

When the lawyer entered the school-room, he looked around him with an admiring air, though there was really little to admire in the mud walls, the ink-stained desks, the rude benches, the uneven floor, and the stifling atmosphere.

“Ah, what a charming occupation it must be to teach the young idea how to shoot ! How I envy you your employment, Mr. Stirling. I who, as a lawyer, am brought frequently into contact with the worse features of our nature, seem positively to breathe an atmosphere of innocence in this

place. It refreshes me," said McWyllie, taking a pinch of snuff; "it has all the charm of novelty."

"I suppose your errand here was not to breathe an atmosphere of innocence, as you call it," said Stirling, dryly; "if you were as much accustomed to it as I am, perhaps you would not find it so refreshing."

"Ah, that may be," said the lawyer, sententially; "we are never so thankful for our blessings as we should be, and that reminds me of my object in calling upon you; but I suppose you are so wedded to your duties that you would not like to try a change."

"That would depend upon whether I could better myself by the change. I am an old soldier, more familiar with the sword than the tawse: but necessity has no law; *cedant arma togæ*. I submit to my fate, but I am ready to accept anything better."

"It seems almost an insult to offer a gentleman of your classical attainments and warlike fame such a humble appointment, but old McNickum, the sheriff's officer at Islayhead, is dead. He has been sair fer-

fochen for many a year with usquebaugh and a bad wife, but it is to be hoped he is in a place now where there are no whisky shops or ill-tongued jades of women, honest man. Well, what would you say to giving up the *toga*, or tawse, as I suppose we may freely translate it, and resuming the *arma* in the shape of a sheriff-officer's staff. Smuggling, poaching, thieving, sorning, and all kinds of mischief are on the increase in this quarter, and we want a man to put it down—a man like yourself, who fears neither hog, dog, nor devil.”

The lawyer watched Stirling's face, to see what effect his words had produced. He might as well have tried to read the face of the Sphinx; the old soldier had as much control over his features as an Indian warrior, and received the proposal with perfect gravity.

“Should I require to give up my house and my school?”

“I am afraid you would; as the sheriff-court meets at Islayhead, you would have to live there, but you would be a gainer by the change.”

“Old people do not like changes. I am

obliged to you for the offer, but I shall stick to my school."

"You might give up the school, and continue to reside in your present house. You could easily walk to Islayhead every day. Would that suit you?"

"I should be glad to be quit of these brats on any terms; and if I can retain my house, I shall be prepared to accept the appointment."

The lawyer was shrewd enough to observe that Stirling had some secret reasons for wishing to continue in his present house. Was the money concealed in it, and stowed away in some secret place, where the eye of justice could not detect it? Was that the reason why he would choose rather to walk six miles a day than to occupy a house in Islayhead? Which would be the better plan—to bring the officers of justice to search the house at once, and to trust all to a *coup de main*, or to wait till Stirling attempted to change some of the gold, and then to seize him? Nothing but the notes of the local banks circulated in that part of the country; and if, after a time, he was thrown off his guard, and tried to change

the gold, then would be the time to bring him to justice. He decided on the latter course; it was more in keeping with his own cautious, watchful nature, which rendered him averse to all extreme or violent measures.

“It is a pity,” continued McWyllie, “that you are not sworn in already, as we have some work ready for you. Lord Nairn was robbed, on the night of the fire, of a large sum of money, and such a man as you might be useful in assisting us to detect the thief.”

He watched the schoolmaster's face closely as he said these words; but Stirling looked quite unconscious of the keenness of his scrutiny, and quietly asked:—

“Do you suspect any one?”

“I am an old lawyer, Mr. Stirling, and do not like to be cross-examined. It matters little whether I suspect any one or not, so long as I have no proof. Lord Nairn was in company with Ninian Kynoch, having dined with him at Inverchewan Castle; and it appears that on the way home there was a quarrel between them—when the bree is in, wit is out, you know. Blows

were exchanged, and Nairn, who had the worst of it, was left insensible on the ground. After a time he recovered, and sought shelter for the night in the miller's house. It was then that he missed his money."

"No one is more likely to have taken it than that old miserly hulks of a miller. *Quo plus habet, eo plus cupit*—you know."

"No doubt, no doubt, but, however much the miller may have desired it, he had no opportunity of taking it, so we must look for the thief elsewhere. I should have been more inclined to suspect the nephew, if it had not been for his conduct in saving Nairn's life on the night of the fire."

"A fire has much the same effect on some men as a battle; they lose themselves in the excitement of the moment, and, acting from irresistible impulse, often perform actions which on ordinary occasions they would never attempt. I knew a case of a soldier, who had met with gross injustice from the captain of his company, and who had repeatedly sworn that he would be revenged, though it should cost him his life. It was during Wellington's cam-

paign in Spain. While storming one of the towns occupied by the French, our men were at first repulsed, and after they had retired, it was discovered that this officer had been left wounded in the breach. He was not much of a favourite among the men, and no one seemed disposed to try to save him from falling into the hands of the enemy, when the soldier who hated him suddenly rushed to his aid, raised him in his arms, and bore him back in safety amid the cheers of his comrades. It was the interest of this soldier that his officer should have died, and if he had died he would have rejoiced at his death, but acting on a sudden and irresistible impulse which overpowered every other consideration, he saved his life. May not young Kynoch have acted from a similar impulse?"

"You think, then, that the miller's nephew took the money?"

"My thoughts are my own, and I am too old a soldier to be entrapped by a lawyer. All that I affirm is, that his conduct on the night of the fire was not inconsistent with the idea of his being guilty."

"You will admit, at least, that it is no

proof of his guilt. Lord Nairn is ready to give a liberal reward to any one who will give such information as shall lead to the detection of the thief; but I am afraid that you cannot render us any assistance, so I must take my leave."

"Wait a little," said Stirling. "I do not like to peach on a chum, but when there are rewards going I do not see why I should not have a share, so I shall make a clear breast of it, and tell you all that I saw that night. I had been out rather late on some private business of my own, and on my way home I heard the sound of two people quarrelling, near the spot where the road to Loanhead strikes off from the main road. It was a quiet night, so that I could hear the sound, though at a great distance; in about twenty minutes I reached the spot, and found Ninian Kynoch stooping down and searching among the grass as if in search of something. I stole gently up to him and seized him by the arm, just as he had picked up a gold coin, of which I jocularly claimed the half; he seemed very much frightened at first, and little disposed to be communicative, but at length he told me he had struck Lord

Nairn, and left him insensible on the ground while he went for assistance; on his return he was gone, and he observed the gold coin, and was about to pick it up when I startled him. I advised him to return the coin, and to write a letter of apology to Lord Nairn, which he agreed to do. He seemed to be in a very excited state, and spoke of leaving the country next morning, but I attributed his uneasiness to his dread of the consequences of his encounter with Lord Nairn. I did not know then that his lordship had been robbed, or I might have attributed it to another cause."

"That was a strange case you mentioned about the soldier. I wonder if it was true?"

"No one is in a better position to vouch for it than myself, as I am the man. *De me fabula narratur.*"

"Then you are the thief," said the lawyer to himself. "You could not resist the temptation to rob Nairn any more than you could resist the temptation to save his life. In both cases you acted from impulse, and the one act was not inconsistent with the other. You have given me the key to your own character."

McWyllie saw that nothing more could be done at present, so he left Stirling with the assurance that his evidence might yet prove very valuable, and that he would bear in mind his promise about the appointment of Sheriff's officer. During the drive to Islay-head he surprised the Partan and Donald by the sparing use he made of his tongue and whip ; he was meditating on the inconsistencies of human nature, and the strange mixture of good and evil to be found in its composition.

He was satisfied that Stirling was the thief, though he had great doubts whether any evidence could ever be procured against him ; he felt that he was a desperate ruffian, who held human life cheap, and might prove a formidable enemy ; but he was convinced also that he would be valuable as an officer of justice, so he resolved to act on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, and to procure him the place vacated by the deceased McNickum.

Stirling, on his part, was equally willing to accept the appointment. He hated his duties as schoolmaster with his whole heart and soul, and avenged himself for the hardness of his fate by the cruelties which he

practised on the miserable urchins entrusted to his care. He was glad, therefore, on this ground, to exchange the birch-rod for the *bâton*, and the irksome duties of the school-room for the excitement of serving writs, hunting down sturdy beggars, and arresting suspicious characters. He felt something like the worn-out charger at the sound of the trumpet, as he thought of such a life, with all its attendant dangers and excitement. He felt a glow of satisfaction, also, at the thought that such an employment would always afford him a pretext for absenting himself from the society of Madame Jacqueline, the only being that he thoroughly dreaded and detested, as she knew many dangerous secrets of his past life, and might betray him into the hands of justice whenever she found it her interest to do so.

His experience of her countrywomen, and the remembrance of certain episodes in her past life, led him to dread the worst, if Madame Jacqueline should ever find it her interest to get quit of him; and for that reason he had not entrusted her with the secret that he had stolen Nairn's money,

and was trying to divert suspicion from himself to another.

He was unwilling to leave his house, because it contained all the apparatus for carrying on illicit distillation, and more than one secret excavation, where he could stow away smuggled goods without any danger of detection. He had no intention of giving up these unlawful practices, which he was bound, by the nature of his future office, to suppress; he rejoiced rather that he should now be able to screen himself and his associates from detection, as he would have better means of obtaining information than before.

He was anxious to conceal the gold which he had stolen from Nairn in some place where neither Madame Jacqueline nor any one else would be able to discover it. He was far from being an advocate for the doctrine that there ought to be no secrets between husband and wife; he had carried the money about upon his person ever since the night of the fire, as he was afraid to leave it in any of the places of concealment which were known to Madame Jacqueline. He suspected that the bond which united

them was not so strong as to resist the pressure of any strong temptation, and he was afraid that, if she knew where the money was concealed, she might obtain possession of it, and leave him to lament the loss of both. This Scottish Telemachus might have consoled himself for the departure of his Calypso, but he would never have ceased to regret the loss of his money, so he resolved to use every precaution to prevent such a misfortune.

If he concealed the money anywhere out of the house, it might be discovered by others; if he concealed it in the house, it might be discovered by Madame Jacqueline. It was difficult to conceal anything from that lynx-eyed Frenchwoman, who seemed to watch his every movement by day and by night. On more than one occasion he had risen from bed with the intention of digging a hole in the floor of the house to receive the money, but he had never been able to do so without awakening his wife, who was a light sleeper, as a soldier's wife should be. He felt that it was dangerous to carry about so much money upon his person; he might be arrested upon suspicion, and then the whole of it would be lost, or

Madame Jacqueline might discover it in his pocket, and he might awaken some morning and find that both were gone.

The school was dismissed for the day, and McWyllie's visit was over. Stirling entered the room, which served at once as kitchen, parlour, and bedroom, where he found Madame Jacqueline preparing the *potage* for their dinner.

"Congratulate me, Jacqueline," said Stirling, "You behold in me the representative of law!"

"Explain yourself," said Jacqueline, curtly.

"I am no longer a miserable schoolmaster, a starved dominie. I am about to receive the appointment of Sheriff's officer."

"What does that call itself in French?"

"*Huissier*."

"Bah!" said Jacqueline. "You wish me to felicitate you, *il n'y a pas de quoi*. Between *huissier* and schoolmaster what is the difference? The one is as bad as the other."

"Ay, Jacqueline, the one is as good as the other, and a great deal better too, as the Irishman said; I shall no longer be shut up like a prisoner in that stifling schoolroom;

I may roam wherever I choose, without suspicion ; and in my new vocation I may be useful to my comrades, the free-traders. Think, also, of our rise in the social scale ; you will now be a lady of distinction, and will take that place in society to which your beauty and accomplishments entitle you."

"I expect to live to see you some day take *your* place 'aux lampions'—the place of all others which you most deserve."

"Why, Jacqueline, you are quite complimentary to-day ; but I do not intend quite yet to dance a hornpipe upon nothing for your amusement. But, come, old girl, promotion does not come every day, so this shall be a *jour de fête*. I have got a bottle or two of real old cognac, which has never paid king's duty ; what better use can we make of them than devoting them to the health and prosperity of *M. le Huissier*?"

"Oh, with all my heart !" said Jacqueline, who laboured under a kind of chronic dipsomania. "With the water of life, what would I not do ? If it be strong and old, I would *trinquer*—what you call hob-nob with the devil."

"You were always ambitious, Jacqueline, and choice in the selection of your society. For the present you must defer hob-nobbing with the personage you mention, though I have no doubt that pleasure is still in store for you. I do not know what sort of cellar he keeps down below, but I have no doubt but he can always supply you with something hot—quite as hot as this—old woman."

Jacqueline might have retaliated in the same strain, if Stirling had not soothed her into good-humour by presenting her with a glass of the old Cognac which he so much vaunted. She emptied it at a draught, and held it out to be replenished; but Stirling shook his head and put the bottle into the cupboard, which he locked.

"No, Jacqueline. no more drink at present. We are both public personages now, and have a character to support. Wait till evening, when we shall be safe from interruption and able to enjoy ourselves without fear."

Jacqueline longed, panted, thirsted for the evening; time seemed to fly with leaden wings; but at length he spread his

dark curtain over earth and ocean, and announced to her that the hour of enjoyment was come. Stirling bolted the door and closed the shutters, and produced the brandy from the cupboard. Husband and wife then sat down at table, apparently to drink themselves drunk like Benhadad and the captains of his host; but only apparently, for both had resolved, for reasons of their own, to keep sober.

Jacqueline had been led to think that Stirling had committed, or was meditating some crime, from hearing him talking in his sleep about gold, and observing that he frequently rose during the night, and only returned to bed on finding that she was awake. His offer of drink might be only a cloak for some ulterior purpose; it was difficult for her to keep sober, but her life might be at stake; she would resist the temptation, and watch him. The scene of debauchery that ensued need not be described. It was kept up till midnight; Jacqueline drank, or affected to drink hard, and passed through all the intermediate stages of drunkenness, till she sank apparently unconscious on the floor. Stirling

raised her in his arms, and threw her roughly on the bed ; he then dipped his head into a bucket full of water, and rubbed it with a coarse towel. He was a seasoned toper, but the cognac had not been without its effect upon him. The water cooled his brain, and now was the time to hide the money.

He cleared away the remains of their debauchery, and opening the cupboard from which he had taken the brandy, he drew out from a drawer a loaded pistol, with which he marched up to the bed where Jacqueline lay. She breathed heavily. He held the candle close to her eyes, but they never winked ; he presented the pistol at her head, but there was no movement.

“ Let her sleep, the old hag,” muttered Stirling, as he turned away. “ Why should I kill her ? Her husband’s blood is still on my hands.”

He took the key of the door, opened it, and locked it from the outside. He entered the school-room, carefully fastened the door, and closed the shutter of the only window. He placed the candle upon the end of one of the benches close to the fireplace, and brought from a corner the spade

with which he sometimes worked in his small garden. By means of this spade he raised the slab which formed the hearth, and dug a narrow hole a foot deep in the ground. He drew from his pocket a canvas bag, counted the sovereigns it contained upon the table, restored them to the bag, and deposited it in the hole. The stone was replaced, and all traces of what he had been doing were removed.

When Stirling locked the door, Jacqueline rose from her bed and listened. She heard him enter the school-room and close the shutters. With a crafty smile she removed a piece of rag from a small hole which she had made in the mud wall to enable her to see what was passing in the school-room, and watched his proceedings. She had undergone his scrutiny without flinching; she felt that the pistol had been presented at her head, though she did not see it, and she knew that she could now observe all that he did without danger. She saw him remove the stone, dig the hole, count out the gold, and conceal it beneath the hearth. When he had finished, she restored the rag to its former place, and returned to bed.

*“ Ah ! le vieux scélérat, il veut me tromper.
Très bien. Nous verrons.”*

When Stirling returned to the kitchen, he found Jacqueline sound asleep — all was safe.

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Nairn was not neglecting his suit with Marion Leslie. He was in the position of a general with an empty chest, an exhausted commissariat, and a half-mutinious army, who feels that his only chance of success is to trust all to a general engagement. It was with the greatest difficulty that he could persuade the miller to advance him a small sum to cover his more immediate expenses, and as the security he could offer was of a doubtful character, he was obliged to accept the loan on terms which would have made our modern Shylocks turn up their eyebrows. It was in vain that he assured the miller that he was about to be married to Marion Leslie, and would soon have abundant means at his command. To all these protestations he lent a deaf ear, and demanded some more satisfactory proof than his lordship's assertion. There was evi-

dently nothing more to be got out of the miller till Marion had consented to give him her hand.

While laying siege to the fortress of her heart, Nairn was careful to conceal his vices, and to appear always before her to the best advantage. To act such a part was irksome to one of his confirmed habits, and often the craving devil within raged with almost uncontrollable fury, but Nairn, feeling how much was at stake, had the courage or self-denial to resist him for a season. When that season was past he was prepared to indemnify him for his temporary submission, and to give full loose to all those passions which he found it so difficult to control.

At length the decisive day, so pregnant with his fate, arrived. A picnic was arranged to visit some old ruins in the interior of the country, and the party from Inverchewan Castle was joined by one or two of the neighbouring lairds, with their families. Mr. and Mrs. Leslie drove there in an open carriage, and Marion and Nairn occupied the seat behind; he had thus an opportunity of paving the way for the great question which he was about to put.

The worthy laird had given him every encouragement; he had such an inherent respect for ancient blood and noble ancestry, that he could count upon his consent. Mrs. Leslie was more reserved in her bearing; but she was not likely to go against the wishes of her husband and niece. The great point was to obtain Marion's consent, and then to announce his approaching marriage to the fashionable world; when this was done, he could make his own terms about settlements, as the Leslies could not drawback without compromising their niece. The game was all in his favour now, if he only played his cards well.

The drive to the old Castle lay through a rich agricultural, but otherwise uninteresting tract of country, but Nairn, though he was not a devoted admirer of natural scenery, was struck by the romantic beauty of the glen. Most of the country gentlemen in Scotland have some knowledge of local antiquities; their own names are mixed up with the forgotten feuds and skirmishes of their turbulent ancestors, and they feel the same glow of pride in expatiating on them as Æneas did when he

said, with pardonable vanity, "*Quarum magna pars fui.*" A gentleman of the party, who happened to bear the same name as the former proprietor of the estate, acted as *cicerone*, and pointed out all that was most remarkable about the castle and its past history.

The castle had been uninhabited for about a century, and time had been busy in the work of destruction. The lofty tower had been levelled to the ground, and the stones carried off to assist in the erection of the neighbouring farm-houses; a solitary tree grew on the summit of the ruin, and stood there like a sentinel, mourning over its past greatness. The rest of the building had been protected by the great strength of the walls and by a covering of ivy, in the midst of which might be seen the loop-holes, from which many a discharge of musketry had been fired in the troublous times of old. They entered the ruin by one of the windows on a level with the ground, and ascended with some difficulty to the summit, which commanded an extensive view of the neighbouring country. The antiquary expatiated on the strength and durability of the walls,

which were kept together by a kind of cement, the secret of compounding which had perished with the masons of a former age; on the sieges which the castle had undergone in the days of the Covenanters, and during the rebellions in favour of the unfortunate Stewarts; on the miserly habits of the old lord, who had bought this and other estates, and caused the castles to be destroyed, remarking, with grim humour, that when their nests were destroyed, the rooks would not return; on the portentous events which had accompanied the passage of the estate from the old family to its new owner, how the herons had deserted the heronry, and the ravens the lofty rock, where they had built their nests and reared their young for centuries; and other kindred subjects, to all of which his audience listened, or affected to listen, with profound interest, though the thoughts of two of them were more engaged with the present and the future than the past.

And then how tenderly Nairn assisted Marion to descend from the ruins. No doubt there was a charm in grasping that fair hand, and assisting that lithesome form over

the crumbling walls, and a certain pleasure in lingering behind the others, without knowing well why they did so.

They entered a small wooden summer-house, built with exquisite taste, and adorned with sketches in water colours of the most striking parts of the scenery in the vicinity of Islayhead. They examined the book where the visitors entered their names, and were surprised that so few travellers from the south should have visited a spot, remarkable for its natural beauty, and for its connection with the origin of one of the greatest poets of the present century. One or two Oxford students—devoted admirers of the poet, no doubt—had found their way there, and inscribed their names in the book; but the other visitors seemed to have been all connected with the neighbourhood. The antiquary threw open a folding-door at one of the ends of the pavilion, and all the party were charmed with the view of the wooded heights and rocky cliffs which rose on either side of the sluggish stream which meandered through the valley below.

On leaving the ruins, they saw an old

man cutting the grass which grew luxuriantly among the trees.

“That is old William Taylor,” said the antiquary; “he is the Old Mortality of these ruins, he is constantly hovering about them, and knows more about their past history than any other living man.”

William took off his broad bonnet and saluted the company. After a few remarks on the weather—always the first subject for discussion among the Scottish peasantry—the antiquary asked him how old he was, and William, with the garrulity of old age, replied—

“I am just a hunder year old, come the time. Oh, ay, I was a halfling lad when the battle of Culloden was fought, and I have seen some of Charlie’s men begging their bread from door to door. I kent a man that kilt ane o’ them for the sake o’ his silk plaid, but he made awa’ wi’ himsel’ a year or two after. Ill-gotten gain does na thrive wi’ gentle or simple. Do I mind on the auld family that dwelt here? Oh, ay, I mind on the auld laird and his dochter Kitty, that married the captain, ‘Mad Jack,’ as they ca’d him. She had aye a gey cams-

trary temper, and they were weel met. They spent the first sax weeks after the marriage here, and, oh, sic junketing, and feasting, and dancing, and drinking, and devilry o' a' kinds was never seen in thae parts afore. They got auld Johnie Henderson, the piper, to play to them, and they garred the puir body play day and night, till his fingers grew stiff an' he could play nae mair. He was little o' a piper after that, and there was little piping in the castle when Mad Jack left. They say he spent the estate in thae sax weeks, but I dinna ken. They say, too, that he had a son, who wrote sangs nearly as weel as Robbie Burns, and was an awfu' chield among the lasses—he wadna ha been his father's son gin he hadna. Oh, ay, I mind weel on the accident that happened to the young lord when his father bought the land. Ye see, I was working a pair o' horse at the mains, and I was returning frae the port toon wi' my twa carts. It was a dark nicht; on a lonely pairt o' the road, a man dashed past me on horseback. The horse was a' white wi' faim, but, Lord preserve ye, sir, the rider had nae heed ava. Gin he passed me ance, he passed me a

dizzen times, aye at the tap o' his speed, and it was an awfu' sicht to see. The faim flew frae the horse in flakes, as he dug his spurs into his sides, and tore his mou wi' the bit. My hair stood up like birse, and whan I tried to speak, I seemed to hae lost the use o' my tongue. I lay in my cairt mair deed than alive, till I met a rider wi' a heed, ridin' like daft, 'What news?' I cried. 'Bad news,' he shouted, 'the young lord has fallen from his horse, and broken his neck.' I kent what the heedless horseman ment syne. He fell beside the well, there, on the green, and his lady was lookin' owre the castle wa, admiring her lord, as well she micht, for he hadna his match for strength in a' the kwenstra side. I saw him ance redd twa men wha were fichtin, and he just took aye in ilka hand and rappit their heeds thegither till they rattled again. He was a different man frae the auld miser his father, wha deed o' a disease that the doctor ca'd *Forbes particulars*. Ay, the doctors have queer names for diseases.

"I have often seen the young lord ridin' his horse on the green in the bonny moonlight nichts, when on my road hame wi' a

load o' grass for the kye; but he never meddled wi' me, and I never meddled wi' him—it wadna hae been canny.

“Oh, ay, I ken the Hagberry pot—it is a deep pool down there, in the water. There is a queer half-daft chield who comes down here ilka ither simmer frae Lunnon, and he tells me it got its name because they drooned and buried the wutches there. Oh, ay, there are wutches still. I ken ane that lives doon by the wuterside there, that used to come oot at nicht like a hare, but a fairmer gied her skoudrum; he fired at her wi' a siller saxpence, and she has aye been a lamester sin syne. Aweel, they say that the gates of the castle, an' heaps o' siller besides are a' lyin' at the bottom o' the Hagberry pot, and that water kelpie sits there keepin watch o'er them.”

The antiquary, wishing to arrest the flow of William's loquaciousness, produced from his pocket a flask of brandy, and filling an ample bumper presented it to him. William, after surveying the party with a benignant air, said, with a slight inclination of his head, “Here's wussin' a' yer guid

healths," and drank it off with an air of satisfaction which proved that a century of years had not weakened his appreciation of good liquor.

Nairn and Marion had not remained to listen to William's reminiscences. Nairn was familiar with the locality, and invited Marion to accompany him to a spot which commanded a charming view of the ruins, but which was too far distant for the elder members of the party to visit it. It was with a fluttering heart that Marion consented; she had long anticipated this hour, and now that it was come she shrank from it with all the timidity of female delicacy. They slipped away from the others without being observed, and descended the steep side of the glen by a rustic path, which in certain parts was over-arched by the trees, and afforded a pleasant shade. In some places it had been hewn out of the solid rock, and the precipice below was steep enough to justify Nairn in assisting Marion in her descent. Few words were exchanged between them, and those few were cold and constrained, till they crossed the stream by a wooden bridge, and reached a small clump

of firs, when they turned round and looked in the direction of the castle, which crowned the opposite height and towered aloft in solitary grandeur above the neighbouring trees.

“What a charming view,” said Nairn. “Could you not sketch it? You have not forgotten your lessons at the *Maison Royale*, and I should like to have some *souvenir* of our visit to this spot.”

Nairn improvised a seat for Marion, and lay down on the green sward to watch the progress of her work. At first her fingers trembled a little, and refused to guide the pencil with their wonted skill, but, gradually regaining her courage, she soon finished a sketch, not remarkable indeed for artistic finish, but sufficiently accurate to preserve the remembrance of the scene. Nairn begged that he might be allowed to keep it, and placed it carefully in his portfolio.

Marion reminded him that it was time to return. They walked slowly till they came to the rustic wooden bridge, where they stopped for a moment to look at a deep pool which the stream, arrested in its

current, had dug out before it could resume its course. Marion never forgot that moment or that spot. She was haunted in after years by the remembrance of that sluggish stream with its deep, dark, death-like pool and the tangled grass growing over its surface; but, at the moment, she was too much engrossed with the passionate words which Nairn poured into her ear to take much note of the scenery around.

It was an old, old tale which Nairn told—a tale which is told much the same way by peasant and peer—a tale which is sweeter to a maiden's ear than all the music of the spheres, when for the first time she loves and listens.

Marion *did* love, and she could not choose but listen, as Nairn told her how unworthy he felt himself of her affection—how aimless and purposeless his life had been till he met her, and how intolerable life would be to him unless she consented to make him happy by bestowing her hand upon him. This is but a meagre account of what Nairn said, while Marion tried in vain to withdraw her hand from his, but the imagina-

tion of the young and the memory of the old will supply what is wanting.

It was in vain that Marion urged him not to detain her, as their absence would be remarked; he swore that he would never leave that spot, that he would plunge into that horrible pool below, unless she gave him some hope. Marion shuddered at the idea of bringing the young nobleman to such an untimely end, and to prevent the catastrophe which he hinted at, said softly, "Speak to my uncle."

Nairn could interpret these words; he pressed her hand to his lips, and protested that he was the happiest of men. He assured her that he should have no difficulty with her uncle or aunt, who had already divined the object of his visit to the north, and would not have allowed him to continue his visits to the Castle, if they had not approved of his suit. He would break the subject to them that very night, and if he obtained their consent, he would start the next day for London and announce his approaching marriage to his father. Marion thought him a very dutiful son, as she looked up lovingly in his face and said,

“ You will not be long away ? ”

The reader will divine what answer Nairn made to such a question. Marion blushed and turned away her head.

On returning to the old Castle they found their party about to sit down to a cold collation, which had been spread out on the green sward. As is usual on such occasions, the gentlemen had to wait upon the ladies, and Nairn devoted himself to Marion with exclusive gallantry, but as she was the only single lady of the party, his attentions were thought quite *en règle*, and passed unremarked. Mrs. Leslie alone inferred from Marion's heightened colour and Nairn's jubilant air that they had come to an understanding, and she herself, the daughter of a “ paper ” lord, was not displeased that her niece should become connected with a branch of the aristocracy whose titles were more ancient and permanent.

During the drive home, Nairn occupied his former place by Marion's side, and whispered into her ear thousands of those sweet nothings which mean so little to others, but convey so much to the party beloved.

Was Nairn acting a part, or was he sincerely attached to Marion? He was as much attached to her as his coarse, groveling nature would permit him to become attached to anyone; but he would never have dreamed of marrying her if she had not been possessed of a fortune. The first thought in his mind was, "I shall be able to pay off the most urgent of my creditors and to frequent my former haunts;" his second, "I shall not be ashamed of my wife when she takes her place in society." It is fortunate that ladies do not always know what is passing in the minds of their accepted lovers.

Nairn remained to dinner at Inverchewan Castle. After dinner, Marion, as had been agreed beforehand, rose and left the room, and when Mrs. Leslie was about to follow, Nairn requested her to remain, as he wished to consult her and her husband upon a matter of importance. When she was seated, he proceeded to inform them that he had admired their niece from the time when he first saw her in France, and that their subsequent intercourse, he had reason to believe, had ripened into a mutual attachment.

He had that day made a declaration of his sentiments, and, while Miss Leslie had admitted that his person was not altogether indifferent to her, she had refused to enter into any engagement without the consent of her uncle and aunt. He now submitted the matter to their decision, and his future happiness depended upon that decision. If they should deem him worthy of being entrusted with such a precious charge, he would lose no time in proceeding to London and submitting the matter to his father, the Marquis of Menteith. He thought he might count upon his consent, as the Leslies and the Menteiths had been connected by marriage in former times, and though he was now of age, and master of his own actions, he thought it only respectful to obtain his approval.

Mrs. Leslie shed a few natural tears at the idea of losing her niece, whom she sincerely loved. The laird was not less attached to her, but the brilliant prospect of her wearing a coronet, consoled him for the loss of her society. They both signified their consent, and expressed their warmest wishes for their future happiness.

Mr. Leslie was about to make some reference to marriage settlements, when Nairn begged him to desist, as he was too much overpowered by a sense of his present happiness to be able to enter upon any such material considerations; he wished all these matters to be arranged by his father and Mr. Leslie, who would be best able to consult the interests of both parties. The rest of the evening was spent in Marion's society, and Nairn regretted the cruel necessity which obliged him to leave her even for a few days.

Before leaving the Castle next morning, Nairn took Mr. Leslie aside and told him that it would be more respectful to his father, if he were to write and to inform him that he had received a formal proposal for the hand of his niece, and while disposed to accept that proposal, he thought it better to withhold his formal consent, till he had learned what were his wishes upon the subject. It was a mere matter of etiquette; but, as his father was somewhat stiff and formal in his manners, and strictly observant of all the usages of the high circle of society in which he moved, it might

be well to announce the approaching marriage to him.

Mr. Leslie was rather gratified than otherwise at the proposal, and sat down to write a letter worthy of the subject and the party to whom it was addressed. The worthy laird was as choice as any euphuist of the Elizabethan age in the selection of words which were to undergo the critical inspection of a nobleman of such high rank. He rejoiced that the ties which united the Leslies and the Menteiths in past ages were likely to be renewed, and expressed a hope that his lordship would soon honour his humble mansion of Inverchewan with his presence, when all the preliminaries concerning the marriage could be arranged.

When Nairn read over the letter, he could scarcely refrain a smile at the allusion to the former ties between the Leslies and the Menteiths, and the euphuistic expressions which the laird had culled from his somewhat limited vocabulary for the occasion; but he had the prudence to conceal his amusement, and assured Mr. Leslie that, armed with such a letter, he had no doubt but his father would at once signify his

approval of the match, and accompany him on his return to Scotland.

Nairn had no intention of showing the laird's letter to his father. He had no doubt whatever but that he would at once consent to the match, when he found it to be his interest to do so, and it was from purely selfish motives that Nairn ever dreamt of consulting him at all. He wished the whole of the estate of Inverchewan to be placed at his own absolute disposal, and the law of entail to be set aside, and only a moderate allowance for life to be settled upon Mr. and Mrs. Leslie. He knew that a large portion of the estate would be at once absorbed to pay his debts, and that, after deducting Mr. and Mrs. Leslie's allowance, there would not be much for Marion and himself to live upon; but, with ruin staring him in the face, he had no power of choice. He was not deficient in self-assurance, but, bad as he was, he would never have had the face to make such a proposal to Mr. Leslie as would, in fact, have reduced him from a state of affluence to be a pensioner upon the estate. He knew that his father would have no such scruples,

and thought it better that the task of breaking the matter to Mr. Leslie should be confided to him. He was gifted with that eloquence which can make the worse appear the better cause, and his haughty manners and aristocratic bearing would so overawe Mr. Leslie that he would submit to anything which he proposed. It was better, therefore, that his father should come down to Inverchewan to assist in drawing up the marriage settlements, and that he should bring his own man of business along with him. He knew that his noble father would at once swoop down upon the prey as soon as he learned that he was to have a share. Self-interest was a more powerful feeling in the breast of the noble lord than parental affection; as soon as he convinced him that he should have a share in the spoil, he could count upon his co-operation. Nairn, remembering the past, resolved that that share should be as small as possible.

When Nairn left the castle, he rode straight to the miller's. He dismounted from his horse, and tying him to a tree entered the house without further ceremony. He found the miller in his bed-

room, counting his money upon the table, and when the room door suddenly burst open, he threw himself upon it, as a mother would do upon her child, to protect it from harm. Nairn made a dart at it, as if he intended to appropriate some of it, when the miller uttered a shriek of mingled terror and despair, and tried to cover the money with his body.

“Why, old money-bags, do you not know me?” said Nairn; “you look as much scared as if old Scratch had come to carry you off, gold and all.”

“Ha, ha!” said Adam, with a hysterical giggle, which had something almost pathetic in it. “Your lordship is pleased to be facetious, I have aye been a wee thing nervous syne the fire, and, I admit, you startled me. I thought ye might be a thief.”

“Not exactly a thief, old boy, though I have come to carry off some of your money. I start for London this day, and want you to provide me with the wherewithal. Come, old cent-per-cent, there is no use saying you have not got the money, the half of that on the table will answer my purpose.”

And Nairn again made a clutch at the

sovereigns which lay next him on the table, and laughed heartily as Adam tried to push his hand away. The miller was beginning his usual excuses, when Nairn placed the laird's letter to his father in his hand, and said,—

“Look at that.”

The miller took the letter, and as he read it his face was lighted up with a gleam of satisfaction and triumph, which Nairn ascribed to the prospect of recovering the money he had already lent, and of advancing more on the securities which he could now offer. Strange as it may appear, the miller thought of neither; he had just been gloating over his gold, but he now began to gloat over the approaching ruin of a family which he detested, and the accomplishment of his long cherished hopes of revenge.

Those hopes could only be realized by using Nairn as the blind instrument of his vengeance. He was well acquainted with the young nobleman's reckless, extravagant habits, and he refused to advance him money unless he consented to agree to such terms as would ultimately place him entirely in his power. Nairn thought only of the present,

and was prepared to accept any terms provided the miller furnished him with an immediate supply of money.

When Nairn left him, the miller rubbed his hands and laughed with malicious glee.

"There is nae fule like an auld fule; Inverchewan will soon have to part wi' a' his bonny rigs, and maybe I'll come in for a share. Curse him, he will be glad to tak' a pinch frae my sneeshin' mull yet."

Nairn set sail that very day, and on reaching London took a cab, and drove straight to the square in the West-End where his father dwelt. The noble marquis, though possessed of limited means, contrived to live in a manner becoming his rank, and was as remarkable for his economy as his son was for his extravagance. For several years there had been no communication between father and son, but Nairn was confident that his father would forget the past as soon as he learned that he was about to marry a wealthy heiress.

He rang the bell, and on learning from the servant that his lordship was in the library, he burst into the room without being announced. Lord Menteith was lounging in an

easy chair, and glancing at a volume of the "Duc de Sully's Memoirs," when his son suddenly stood before him. A blush of surprise and anger crimsoned his face, but restraining these feelings, he rose with dignity, and requested to know his wishes.

Lord Menteith was cold, icy cold, in his manners. If his lordship condescended to touch your hand with two of his fingers, you felt a chill at your heart, as if the circulation were about to cease; if he smiled upon you, you felt a freezing sensation all over. He never forgot for a moment that, though poor, he was a peer of France and of Scotland, the representative of a family so ancient that he could afford to look down upon the titled *parvenus* of both countries; he exacted from all the outward respect due to his rank, and treated with superciliousness all who had the misfortune to have less distinguished ancestors than himself. His manners were stately and formal as those of a courtier in the days of Louis XIV.; his pale, cold features seldom relaxed into a smile; and he passed through life like an automaton, careless of everything and of everyone except himself.

He neither loved nor hated his son, but his conduct had brought disgrace upon his ancient name, and he refused to see him because his presence was disagreeable to him. If Nairn had distinguished himself in the field of battle he would have received him on his return with favour, but without enthusiasm; as he had failed to do so, he simply withdrew his countenance from him, and forbade him his presence, a punishment which Nairn bore with patience, as he had no relish for his society, and he had long ceased to pay him his nominal allowance.

Nairn explained to him succinctly the object of his visit, and unfolded the reasons why he was anxious that he should accompany him to Scotland, and take his own man of business with him. He showed clearly that it would be his father's interest as well as his own to lend him a helping hand, and that his lordship, assuming the cloak of parental affection, could easily propose terms which it would be impossible for Nairn himself to submit to the uncle of his future bride.

“At your old tricks again. Murdoch,” said

his lordship, tapping a gold snuff-box, presented to one of his ancestors by Cardinal Richelieu, "but I suppose I must help you."

"Of course you must," said Nairn, "and by helping me you will be helping yourself."

The father and son then formed themselves into a *conseil de famille*, to devise the best means for carrying their scheme into execution. It was agreed that they should call in the aid of the family lawyer, and employ him to draw up the marriage settlements. Nairn was afraid that, if they were submitted to McWyllie's inspection, he might put Mr. Leslie on his guard, and thus defeat their plans; to prevent this, it was agreed that they should impress upon the unsuspecting laird that it would be beneath the dignity of a London lawyer to consult with any local agent. In this way the whole matter would be left in their own hands.

Nairn was sanguine that the laird, who was proud of the idea of his niece becoming a marchioness, and had set his heart upon the match, would not offer any serious opposition, when the nature of the proposal was submitted to him by his father, and sup-

ported by all the plausible eloquence of the family lawyer. That gentleman breakfasted with them the next morning, and Nairn was possessed of sufficient information respecting the rent-roll of the Inverchewan estates, to enable him to draw up settlements, the effect of which would have been to place Nairn in immediate and entire possession of the estates, with the exception of a very limited income, which was settled on Mr. and Mrs. Leslie for life.

The three then started for Inverchewan Castle, where great preparations had been made for their reception. The approaching marriage had been publicly announced, and though some sinister reports respecting Nairn's character and habits had reached Mr. Leslie's ears, and one or two of his old friends had ventured to remonstrate with him, or to put him on his guard, he was proof against all remonstrances or advice, and ascribed them to envy at the noble connection which he was about to form. When McWyllie, the family agent, ventured to hint that it would be well to be careful in the arrangement of money matters, as Nairn was reported to be deeply in debt, Mr.

Leslie treated his advice as an impertinence, and rebuked him in such terms as almost led to an estrangement between them, and made McWyllie resolve that, for the future, he would reserve his advice till it was asked for.

Father and son lost no time, after their arrival at Inverchewan Castle, in opening their battery upon the laird, who was so awed and subdued by Lord Menteith's lofty and imposing manners, that he could scarcely have ventured to oppose any proposal which emanated from such a superior being. Mrs. Leslie alone showed any amount of self-assertion in the presence of his lordship, but this may have been owing to the undisguised contempt which he showed for her forefathers, the paper lords, when she began to expatiate on the dignity of those exalted personages. He said nothing—but the raised eyebrows, and a slight shrug of the shoulders, expressed more eloquently than any words the estimation in which he held Mrs. Leslie and her family. From prudential motives, he submitted to the ordeal of the Leslie picture gallery, and listened with the patience of a martyr to all the exploits of the

Leslies in past ages. How severe that ordeal was, may be learned from his words to his son when they were left alone:—

“Ay, Murdoch, you ought to be a good son, for I have suffered much for your sake.”

His lordship's sufferings soon came to an end. The poor laird consented to everything they proposed, and kept his wife in ignorance of the great sacrifice he had made to secure such a noble alliance. Mr. Hamilton performed the marriage at the castle in the presence of a few friends of both families, and Lord and Lady Nairn started on their marriage tour.

Lord Menteith and his lawyer lost nothing by their journey to the north.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY NAIRN left Inverchewan Castle without paying a visit to her former friends at Loanhead. She wrote to Alice in affectionate terms, and promised to call upon them the next time she was in that part of the country, and made the best excuses she could for her apparent neglect. Alice read the letter, and breathed an ardent prayer for the happiness of the writer; and when the poor fisherman's family knelt to worship the God of their fathers, the orphan who had once been one of them was not forgotten.

Ninian felt that moral prostration which was the natural result of his disappointed hopes and long illness, and longed for a change of scene. He had always been treated with the greatest kindness and sympathy by Mr. Hamilton, who had a sincere

respect for his manly, truthful, unselfish character, and strove, on every occasion, to prove himself his friend. He advised him not to form any hasty decision about the ministry, as his views on that question might change, when his mind had regained a healthier tone, and promised to do his best to procure for him a travelling tutorship—a kind of employment to which he was not averse, as it would afford him an opportunity of visiting other countries and enlarging his knowledge of men and manners. He would have preferred the sea, but Mr. Hamilton persuaded him that he would be more useful and happy in turning his learning to some account, than in resuming his former place on the fore-castle.

About a month after Marion's marriage, Mr. Hamilton called one day at Stormy Jack's cottage and requested to see Ninian. When he was introduced into the small room which Ninian dignified with the name of study, he told him that he had received an application from his brother, a proprietor in the south of Scotland, to look out for a tutor for his son, a young man who had just left Oxford, and was about to travel for a year

upon the continent. During his residence at that seat of learning, he had imbibed the religious views which were then becoming fashionable among a certain section of the professors and students, and had learned to speak of his native country and her institutions in a contemptuous tone, which jarred upon the feelings of his father, who was sincerely attached to the Presbyterian form of religion, and anxious that his son should continue in the church to which his forefathers belonged. It was for this reason that he wished to have a Scotch tutor for his son, and applied to his brother as the most suitable person to select one.

Ninian professed his unfitness for such an office; he was probably inferior in scholarship to young Mr. Hamilton, and certainly not sufficiently versed in theology to be able to combat his views, however agreeable to his own feelings such an appointment might be. He felt that the acceptance of it would involve responsibilities which he was not prepared to assume, and that he must decline the offer with thanks. Mr. Hamilton requested him to defer his decision till he had an opportunity

of meeting father and son, who were about to pay him a visit at the manse.

Soon after Ninian was invited to meet them at dinner. Owing to the character which he had received from Mr. Hamilton, Ninian met with a gracious reception from the laird, who differed little from others of his class. He was descended from a family which had suffered much in the religious persecutions under the Stuarts, for their adherence to the principles of the Solemn League and Covenant, and professed himself a devoted adherent of the Kirk, not so much from conviction as from family pride. A strict Presbyterian himself, he did not object to his son tampering with black pre-lacy so far as to sign the thirty-nine articles on his admission to Oxford; but he expected him to atone for this temporary bending of the knee in the house of Rimmon by an open profession of Presbyterianism on his return to Scotland. Unfortunately for the laird's peace of mind, his son's principles were not so elastic as his own; he ventured to think for himself and to tell his father that the thirty-nine articles and the Confession of Faith were not identical,

that Oxford and Geneva were the two opposite poles of Protestant theological thought, and that, from sincere conviction, he was a member of that church whose articles he had subscribed. He refused to take his place in the family pew; he persisted in attending the church of the Rev. Mr. McCassock, the Episcopal clergyman of the neighbouring town; he knew all the Saints' days by heart, and fasted every Friday. The parish minister shook his head, and said that young Hamilton had drunk of the cup of enchantment of the scarlet lady who sits on the seven hills, and become a renegade to the religion of his fathers, and the tenantry lamented that the young laird should have forsaken the good cause. Old Nanny, who had been his nurse, and now kept one of the gates, wept over him when he came back from Oxford, and pushed back his hair from his brow to see whether he had the mark of the beast on his forehead. When she observed there the mark of a former blow from a cricket-ball, she wrung her hands in despair and wept for her "puir lost laddie!"

The laird at first tried the force of argu-

ment, but only lost his temper when his son, by the use of a dexterous logic, hemmed him into a corner, or placed him *hors de combat*. The parish minister had fared equally ill; he was familiar with all that concerned the striking of the fiars, the Court of Teinds, and the augmentations, past and contingent of his own stipend; but he was ill-adapted to carry conviction to a young and thoughtful mind, or to alter opinions which were the result, not of traditional belief, but of earnest and conscientious inquiry.

Young Hamilton spent much of his time in the study of patristic theology, and showed no taste for the pastimes and amusements suitable to his age and rank, except that he was passionately fond of boating—a taste acquired at Oxford. Soon after his return from the University, he began to write the lives of the Scottish saints who have been enrolled in the Romish calendar, and had made considerable progress in this literary undertaking, when his father discovered the manuscript, and, with inconsiderate folly, threw it into the fire. This act of destruction roused his son into open

rebellion, and he threatened to leave his father's house for ever, and to enter into a convent, if his religious faith or literary pursuits were in any way interfered with for the future.

It was then that the laird wished to procure a travelling tutor for his son, and applied to his brother to assist him. Mr. Hamilton invited his brother and nephew to visit him at the manse, and spoke to the laird in favour of Ninian. The laird was kind and condescending, but Ninian felt more deeply interested in the young enthusiast who had formed strong religious convictions, and adhered to them in spite of opposition, at an age when the human mind is usually occupied with far different pursuits.

There are some men whom we come to know and like at once. There is a kind of mental clairvoyance which enables us to see what is in them at a first glance, and, seeing much that we love and admire, we are drawn towards them by an irresistible charm. Young Hamilton had this effect upon Ninian; when he looked upon that pale, thoughtful face, lit up by large black

eyes, which seemed to be peering into a world of mysticism unseen and unknown by all save those gifted with the faculty divine, he felt that he was not one to be gained over by dry dogmas, but that he was endowed with a tender, affectionate heart, which could be swayed by sympathy and friendship.

Ninian and he had a walk by the sea-side, and soon found themselves in a boat. They were both at home in the use of the oars, and Ninian was surprised that a slim youth like Hamilton could row like a sailor. Hamilton was equally surprised to find that a Scotch student of divinity could row as well as the captain of his boat at Oxford, and was led to enquire how he had acquired this accomplishment. Ninian related to him the story of his life, all except that part which referred to his romantic attachment to Marion. Young Hamilton, encouraged by his example, was led, also, to speak of *his* past life, and thus a friendship sprang up between these two young men, which their subsequent intercourse strengthened.

As the impression which Ninian made on the laird was equally favourable, he received

the offer of the tutorship under conditions so favourable that he could no longer decline it, and he was left at liberty to adopt whatever steps he deemed best for the improvement of his pupil. It was agreed that they should travel on the Continent for a year, during which they were to visit the principal capitals of Europe, to spend a few months at a German university, and to return by Paris. Ninian, after taking leave of his relations, accompanied the Hamiltons to the south, where he spent a few weeks at their family seat, before starting with his pupil for the Continent. It is not our intention to accompany them on their tour. Ninian enjoyed the advantages of travelling as much as his companion, and his letters written during this period to Mr. Hamilton, prove that his natural taste for the fine arts was improved by visiting the most celebrated galleries in Europe. He still retains—for we are happy to say that he is alive—the same love for art which distinguished him at this period of his life, but we have striven in vain to persuade him to publish the record of his travels. From the letters written to Mr. Hamilton, we learn that the

familiar and daily contact with popery, such as it is on the Continent, opened his pupil's eyes to the true nature of that system, and cured him of his leanings in its favour, so that he was willing to gratify his father by remaining nominally attached to the religion of his fathers. As the laird ascribed this happy change to Ninian's good influence, his gratitude was great, and he promised to do everything in his power to advance his prospects in life.

Meanwhile we leave Ninian and young Hamilton wandering from city to city of the sunny south, lingering with delight at every spot rendered familiar to them by the writers of ancient Rome, and hanging with breathless interest on the great productions of mediæval and modern art—and return to Lord and Lady Nairn. We are aware that in so doing we are erring against all the canons of art, and the example of others of the craft, who regard marriage as a panacea for all human ills, and leave their hero and heroine to the enjoyment of their perfect bliss.

With sacrilegious hand we must draw aside the veil with which more decorous

writers would conceal the married life of Lord and Lady Nairn. There is no pleasure in dwelling on scenes of human depravity or human suffering, and their married life shall be described only so far as is necessary for the purposes of our story. Those who wish to know more of it in detail may be referred to the reports of the cases which come under the judgment of Sir Cresswell Cresswell, the publication of which forms a new phasis in our civilization, and tends, doubtless, to improve the morals of the rising generation.

Nairn was riddled with debt (to borrow an expressive Gallic idiom) before he married Marion Leslie. He owed everyone who would lend him money, from the soldier servant, who cleaned his boots and brushed his clothes, to his brother officers who sat with him at table. Nairn never lost sight of his great mission in life, which was to borrow, and, after borrowing, to spend. A title is always worth something in England, when its owner knows how to use it aright; an Englishman has a natural and inherent respect for rank, apart altogether from personal qualities, and will always open his purse to

a lord when he would close it against an untitled beggar. But there are limits even to an Englishman's admiration of rank, and Nairn had exhausted the liberality of all who had once assisted him. Mowbray had advanced him money, but he did so in the hope that he would sell out, and no longer disgrace his regiment.

He borrowed money from Mowbray to go north ; he borrowed money from the miller to go south, and he was indebted to his father for the means to carry off his bride. Lord Menteith was not quite disinterested in making these advances; he was one of those prudent noblemen who rarely do cast their bread upon the waters, and always make sure of finding it after many days ; he took care, therefore, that he should lose nothing by helping his son. He had advanced him a considerable sum to buy presents for his bride, but Nairn disposed of the money differently. The night before he left London, he sauntered into the gambling house where he had behaved so ill to Mowbray. He did not intend to gamble, far from it ; he had parted for ever with this and the other vices of his hotblooded youth, and was about to

settle down as a model member of society, but it would be pleasant once more to see the old place and to hear the rattle of the dice, which had once been as music to his ear, for the last time. There were some of the old fellows still at it ; ah, if he had only back the money he had staked on that green baize, he would be a rich man to-night, but it was too late now ; and yet, why should it be too late ? He knew cases where men had retrieved, in one night, the losses of years, because fortune, hostile before, had at length deigned to smile upon them. And why should it not be so with him ? The tide had already set in in his favour—he was about to marry a rich wife—and if he took it at the flood, he might be borne on to success. The green baize, the glittering lights, the heaps of gold, and the drawling voice of the croupier, had an irresistible influence over him ; he took a vacant seat and began to play. All his hopes seemed about to be realized, the fickle goddess had at length changed in his favour, and so steady was his run of luck that the other players stopped to look on. That night he might have risen from the table with thousands in

his possession, but he tempted fortune too far ; instead of stopping when he found that his luck had changed, he played on recklessly, till he lost all his gains and the money which his father had advanced him. There was no Mowbray there that night, and he left the place cursing his fate, and cursing himself that he had not the courage to blow his brains out.

He started with his father and the family lawyer next morning, and contrived to borrow from the latter enough to pay his expenses down to Scotland. He was thus enabled to conceal from his father his losses at the gambling table, but how was he to procure money to buy suitable presents for his bride ? He could only do this by having recourse to the miller, who, finding how he was situated, exacted such exorbitant terms for the advance, that even Nairn hesitated before accepting them. He had no choice, however, but to accept, and Marion was presented with such gifts as became his future bride.

Nairn paid a second visit to the miller before starting on his marriage tour, but it was not to return the money he had bor-

rowed. He had received several letters from the south, the contents of which seemed to be far from pleasing, if one might judge by his clouded brow and muttered curses as he read them. They were written chiefly by gentlemen of the Hebrew persuasion, who congratulated him, sincerely no doubt, on his marriage, and reminded him, at the same time, of certain monetary transactions which he would willingly have forgotten. The joy of some of these gentlemen was so exuberant that they hinted that they might be tempted to attend his marriage as uninvited guests, and generously to provide him with free quarters during the honeymoon, in a certain locality with which he was already familiar. Their proffered hospitality seemed to be little appreciated, and, on the marriage day, Nairn was afraid that every footman who approached him might be a bailiff in disguise. The sum which he received as Marion's dowry, was barely sufficient to meet the demands of his most urgent creditors, and to indemnify his father for his share in the transaction. Some months must elapse before he could touch the income which arose from his interest in the

Inverchewan property, and meanwhile he had recourse to the miller, who looked as closely to his own interests on this as on former occasions.

Nairn yielded to Marion's desire to visit the more romantic parts of the scenery of her native land, of which she knew nothing except from the description of others, instead of undertaking a continental tour. He cared nothing for the beautiful in nature or art, but he had no desire to return to England till his leave of absence was expired, as he knew that his creditors were ready to pounce upon him as soon as he made his appearance in the south. He trusted that, so long as he remained in the north, running daily from place to place, he would be secure from their attacks; but in this expectation he was disappointed. Gentlemen with hooked noses and resplendent jewellery, turned up in the most unexpected places, and claimed Nairn as their acquaintance. He introduced them to his wife as brother officers, and Marion was surprised that so many of them should have been seized with the mania of travelling in the extreme north, and that her

husband showed anything but pleasure at meeting them. She observed that he always strove to avoid them, and that they were as anxious to see him as he was to escape from them. There were certain papers which Nairn had to sign; but he explained to his wife that they were connected with his regimental duties, and that every officer had to sign them at certain fixed periods. Marion was forced to remain satisfied with this explanation, though she observed that her husband looked depressed, and drank hard, after his interviews with his brother officers.

He threw aside the mask in less than a week after their marriage, and showed himself in his true character. His self-imposed restraint had been most irksome, and as the motive which led him to practice it had now ceased to influence him, it seemed as if he wished to indemnify himself for his temporary self-denial. Marion was slow to believe it; but ten days were sufficient to convince her that she had married a drunkard. What happiness could she expect from her union with a man who was the slave of this degrading vice, and who yielded

to it without resistance? Of what avail to her was a coronet which he who had conferred it daily dragged in the mire and made a mockery of in the eyes of the menials at every inn where they stopped? What hope of happiness could she now entertain, when her husband already preferred the society of his own groom to that of his wife, and indulged in the lowest debauchery within a week of their marriage? Was it for this that she had left her happy home, and her kind uncle and aunt, whose every thought was connected with her happiness?

All these thoughts passed through Marion's mind, as she sat in her solitary room in many a hotel on the banks of the Ness, the Lomond and the Tweed, and listened to the drunken shouts of her husband and his associates, in the coffee-room below. When she came to know the great calamity which had befallen her, she strove to keep her husband by her side, and by allowing him a moderate quantity of drink, to prevent him from exposing himself before all the other inmates of the hotels they visited. But it was in vain;

the sight of a brandy bottle had the same effect on Nairn as blood on a tiger; it roused all that was ferocious and sensual in his coarse nature, and goaded him on to indulge his appetite for drink, till he became little better than a raging maniac, and poured out imprecations against himself, his wife, and every one whom he knew. His outrageous conduct brought him more than once into collision with strangers, who, undeterred by his rank, inflicted on him the punishment which his insolence deserved, and offered him, when he was sober, the satisfaction which one gentleman usually demands from another on such occasions; but Nairn showed that his prudence was greater than his valour.

The poor wretch had his moments of remorse, when he would throw himself at Marion's feet and protest that he was the greatest villain on earth, altogether unworthy of the woman whose fortune he had dissipated, and whose happiness he had ruined. He would vow the most solemn vows and call the name of his Maker to witness that never again should the demon of drink gain the mastery over him; he

would forbid the waiter to place any wine upon the table, and devote himself to his wife's society till the evening set in; then he would become restless and uneasy, he would start from his seat and walk hurriedly up and down the room, till at length, on some frivolous pretext, he left, and Marion saw nothing more of him till he returned or was brought home at a late hour. And then, the fearful oaths, the blasphemy, the foul language, which flowed from his lips, oh! it was horrible to think that she should ever have pledged her faith to such a man. Better—far better never to have left the fisherman's cottage, or to have married the fisherman's son, than to have brought upon herself this misery by uniting her fate with that of such a man.

She had once loved Nairn, but the Nairn whom she loved was the creation of her own imagination, as different from the real one as light from darkness. It was not this man whom she had loved; she pitied him, she prayed for him; but, after one or two exhibitions of his drunken fury, she ceased to love him.

It is sometimes cynically asserted that

women become fonder of their husbands the more reason they have to complain of them, and there are one or two cynical old proverbs to the same effect. If this be true, husbands have the game in their own hands; if Brown perceives that Mrs. Brown's affection for her lord is beginning to flag, and that she at times indulges in opinions and acts subversive of his lawful authority, in order to rekindle her love and to reduce her to obedience, he has only to bestow upon her sundry blows, the more the better, because each additional blow is an additional proof of his affection. And then, the husbands who figure before Sir C. C. for cruelty to their wives, would no longer be misunderstood. Brown might say "My Lord! had I loved her less, I should have used her better!" and every married man on the jury would acquiesce in the justice of Brown's defence.

Marion was an exception to this rule, if it be a rule. She could no longer love the poor, miserable, drunken wretch, who had not a single quality worthy of love, but she knelt down daily and prayed that she might never come to hate him, and that she might

be able to fulfil the vows which she had taken upon her.

On one occasion she was the means of saving his life. They had started early in the forenoon, to visit the celebrated Falls of Foyers, in the neighbourhood of Inverness. It was one of those bright, bracing, sunny days which render the climate of Scotland so charming towards the end of spring. They admired the picturesque hills, now, alas! stripped of the trees which once crowned their summits; they drove along the shores of the lake, sparkling in the sun like molten silver, beneath a natural canopy formed by the interwoven branches of the birch-trees, and even Nairn was so impressed by the beauty of the scenery as to show something of his former better self. On reaching the inn they dismissed the carriage and driver, telling the latter that they should not require him for some hours, and following the narrow path which leads through the blooming heather, they soon reached the falls, a description of which may be found in any guide-book. The traveller who has visited them is familiar with the projecting rock which commands a view of

the seething abyss below, and the roaring torrent above. Marion and Nairn had reached this point, when the latter, who was foremost, and had stooped forward to see the black, whirling pool below, gave a sudden cry, staggered, and all but fell. If Marion had hesitated for a moment, she would have seen his mangled body dashed to pieces on the sharp-pointed rocks below, but, with the instinctive impulse of a brave and true-hearted woman, she clasped her arms round his body, and dragged him back from the brink of the precipice. In the excitement of the moment she lost her footing and fell, but she never lost hold of her husband, who had been seized with a fit. She unloosed his cravat, and washed his hands and his face with water; after a few minutes he regained his consciousness, and tried to rise, but he was too weak to be able to walk, and sank back on the ground.

Marion implored him not to move from his place, as he was still close to the precipice, and hurried to the inn for assistance. She found that the groom had left to visit his friends who lived in the neighbourhood, and that the landlord was not at home; she

hesitated whether she should return to Nairn, or hurry in search of medical aid. She determined on the latter course, and, after sending the landlady to watch by her husband's side till she returned, she contrived to place the horses in the carriage, and drove herself to a house about half-way between the falls and Inverness, which had been pointed out to her as the residence of the village doctor. She was fortunate enough to find him at home, and ready to accompany her, and with his assistance, and that of the groom, Nairn was carried back to the inn, where he lay for three weeks, labouring under an attack of *delirium tremens*.

It was fortunate for Marion that she was not allowed to approach him during his illness, or he might have divulged to her, in his moments of delirium, certain of his antecedents, which, bad as he was, he would never have wished to be known by his wife. The doctor procured the assistance of two sturdy Highlanders from Inverness, who watched him by day and by night, and prevented him from laying violent hands on himself, or throwing himself from the win-

dow, which he repeatedly attempted to do. At length the paroxysm passed away, but it left him weak as a child, and unable to cross the room without the aid of Marion's arm. She nursed him with all a woman's tenderness, bore with all his petulance and irritability without murmur or complaint, and did everything in her power to restore him to health and strength.

When he was strong enough to leave the inn, Marion proposed that they should return to Inverchewan Castle by short and easy stages, but Nairn urged as an excuse for declining this proposal, that his leave was now expired, and that he must lose no time in rejoining his regiment, which had now removed to Shorncliffe. The truth was, that he had no desire to face Mr. and Mrs. Leslie, who were now aware of his embarrassed circumstances, and had learned, when it was too late, that the husband of their niece was a gambler, a drunkard, and a profligate. The empty title was a poor return for the sacrifice of their niece's happiness, and of their own once ample income, all of which had now passed away from them, save the few hundred pounds which had

been settled upon them for life. The simple-minded laird had trusted too implicitly to the honour of Nairn, and his noble father, who had drawn up the marriage settlements in such a way that he and his wife were only pensioners upon their bounty, with barely enough to support the modest style of living to which they had been accustomed.

They travelled south by sea, and the short voyage aided in restoring Nairn to health. The doctor had warned him that a second attack might cut him off, and that his constitution could no longer bear the dissipation in which he had once indulged. The poor wretch, with the terror of death before his eyes, tried to restrain his appetite for drink; he knew that he had been on the brink of the grave, and he was as much afraid to die as he was unfit to live. It was difficult for a man of his weak will to restrain himself on board the Scotch steamer, the cabin of which was constantly redolent of an atmosphere of whisky punch, but Marion used such precautions, by gaining over the steward, as prevented Nairn from falling into any hurtful excess.

He had written to his father from the north, proposing to spend a few days with him on their way through London, and had received a letter, in which Lord Menteith expressed his regret that he was obliged to leave town, and should thus be deprived of the pleasure of seeing his daughter-in-law. This was merely his lordship's *façon de parler*; he had no wish to see his son or his daughter-in-law; he had got all that he expected from them, and wished to avoid witnessing the degradation of the one and the misery of the other. He knew that his son was incorrigible, and that it was only a question of time how soon he would be reduced to beggary; when that time came, he was far from being prepared to kill the fatted calf, and to throw open the door of his hospitable mansion to welcome back his prodigal son.

They remained for a few days at a West-end hotel, and Marion observed that Nairn had frequent interviews with men of the same class as those who had dogged their steps through the Highlands, and whom he had introduced to her as brother officers. Marion had never much faith in their mili-

tary character, and Nairn, throwing aside all disguise, now frankly informed her that they were members of the Jewish fraternity, who had acted the part of the good Samaritan, and relieved his wants when his own father had closed his heart and his purse against him. They were reduced to such straits in London, that they had not the means of paying their bill at the hotel, and it was only by parting with some of her marriage presents that they could procure the means of proceeding to Shorncliffe.

Marion wrote frequently to her aunt, and tried to write cheerfully and hopefully. She never breathed a word against her husband or alluded to his dissipated habits, and her own great unhappiness; like the Spartan boy, she drew her cloak more closely around her that she might conceal the secret sorrow which was gnawing at her heart. She was aware that they had made a great sacrifice for her happiness, though she did not know that they had impoverished themselves without benefiting her, and no persuasion on the part of Nairn could induce her to write to them for further assistance. She would rather have sold every article she possessed,

and laboured with her own hands for their support, than have had recourse to those from whom she had received so much, and all her husband's efforts to shake her resolution were in vain.

The present was so miserable, and the future so dark and gloomy, that her mind naturally reverted to the past, to the time when she was an inmate of the fisherman's cottage, with Ninian as her companion and play-fellow. Ninian, so brave, so truthful, so self-denying, so different from—ah, well! she must not think of that, it was too late now; she had blindly rushed upon her fate, and now she must bear it as best she might. God help her! she was a miserable, helpless, lonely woman, and he who had sworn to defend her was the cause of all her misery. What had she done to bring down upon herself this heavy burden of sorrow, the weight of which was more than she could bear?

Her only hope was that, when Nairn rejoined his regiment he might be restrained, by military discipline, from those excesses which had already undermined his constitution and ruined his health; but his military

career was suddenly brought to a close. He happened one day to meet Captain Heavy-sides, who expressed to him, in the presence of a brother officer, in the simplest and strongest terms, the opinion which he had formed of his conduct in failing to make good his engagements at Windsor, and when it was reported to the colonel of his regiment that he had failed to resent this insult, or to submit the matter to a court of inquiry, that officer left him the option of leaving the service at once, by the sale of his commission, or of being tried by court-martial. Nairn sent in his papers without consulting his wife, who was surprised that he delayed rejoining his regiment, and when she urged on him the necessity of leaving for Shorncliffe, he was at length forced to confess that he was no longer an officer in the British army.

CHAPTER VII.

MONTHS have elapsed since the marriage of Marion Leslie, and all is dark and dreary at Inverchewan Castle. The worthy couple have not seen their noble son-in-law or his lady since they left the Castle, and sinister reports have reached them of his conduct and character. At first these were ascribed to envy, as there was nothing in their niece's letters to confirm them, and they were unwilling to believe that they could be true; but when letter after letter arrived from Nairn and his agents, containing constant demands for money, the conviction was at length forced upon them that their niece's husband was a spendthrift, who had already dissipated his wife's fortune, and forestalled all the revenue which he derived from his interest in the Inverchewan estates.

The laird was slower to believe this than Mrs. Leslie; in truth when she came to

know the exact nature of the marriage settlements, which had been concealed from her at first through the technical language in which they were expressed, her indignation was unbounded. She could not overlook the fact that the laird had sacrificed everything to make provision for his niece, and that they were now merely pensioners upon the estate which they had once proudly called their own. In truth, the laird had retained nothing for their support, except the sum which he had settled on Mrs. Leslie when they were married, and which could not legally be diverted to any other purpose during her lifetime. It was a humiliating position for the laird, but he was really a pensioner on his wife's bounty; he had nothing in the world which he could call his own, except the portrait gallery and the furniture of the castle, neither of which would have fetched much in the market.

Mrs. Leslie observed that the laird carefully concealed all the letters which he received from Nairn, and that the receipt of those letters caused him much anxiety. Actuated partly by curiosity, and partly by a desire to share her husband's sorrows,

whatever they might be, she contrived to get possession of the letters, and through reading them her eyes were opened to the whole extent of their calamity. From that day Mrs. Leslie was no longer the same woman; the shock had proved too much for her, and she told her husband that, as she was the only obstacle in the way to prevent him from bestowing upon the husband of his niece every sixpence he possessed, the only thing that remained for her to do was to die as soon as possible.

And it appeared as if the great object of her life were to die. She gave up all her usual employments, and ceased to take an interest in anything connected with the castle or the estate. She seldom upbraided her husband for what he had done, she was even more obedient and compliant with his will than before, but she always spoke of herself as one who was in the way, and who wished to make place for others. The only occasion when she betrayed her feelings was when the laird spoke of anything connected with the Castle or the estate as being his. For example, if the laird said, with something of his former *bonhomie*:

“Will you take a drive to-day, Maggie, and see the improvements which I am making on my farm of Gowanswells?”

“Excuse me, Mr. Leslie, but it is always right to call things by their proper names. It is not your farm, you have not a foot of land which you can call your own, all belongs to Lord Nairn, or rather to his creditors. We are merely pensioners upon his bounty, and, I daresay, he will be very glad when we are out of the way.”

“Do not speak in that way, Maggie, you make me so unhappy.”

“What right have you to be happy? You have ruined yourself and me, and what have you gained? A titled spendthrift for your niece, who despises us both. It would have been better to have left her in the fisherman’s cottage than to have sacrificed her to gratify your foolish vanity.”

“I thought only of her happiness.”

“You thought only of your own silly pride, and of being able to say ‘my niece, Lady Nairn,’ and for this empty honour you have reduced yourself to a state of beggary.”

“We are as well off as we were before,

Maggie. We never spent so much before as we have now. We have got our niece off our hands, and we have enough to procure us every comfort. What will people say if they see you going about with such a mournful air ? ”

“ They cannot say anything worse than the truth. You may try to disguise the fact, but you know quite well that Nairn only married your niece to enable him to pay his debts, and that, if he had found us as poor then as we are now, he would never have looked over his shoulder at us. Everybody looks down upon us now that we are poor.”

“ Everybody envies us because our niece is a lady of rank and title, and will one day wear a coronet.”

“ Ah, poor lassie, a crown would not make her happy with such a man for her husband ; but there is no use of complaining ; you have made your bed, and you must lie in it. Poor Marion is most to be pitied ; I shall soon be out of the way.”

Mrs. Leslie was right ; she did not long survive the marriage of her niece. She could not be said to be labouring under any particular disease, but she never left her

room or took any interest in anything which was passing around her. Marion's letters failed to rouse her from her apathy and dejection; their affected gaiety could not deceive her; she would shake her head and say:—

“It must be hard to bear up, her heart must be sair, *puir lassie*, and she has no one to comfort her. It is a weary world; I wish I were well out of it.”

Mrs. Leslie's wishes were soon gratified, and the poor old laird was left alone in the world. He had loved his wife as much as his limited capacities of loving would permit, and he now felt her loss deeply when she was gone. Their occasional differences had the effect of a tonic on his moral system, and he would gladly have heard the old familiar voice, though it had retained something of its former querulous tone. But that voice was hushed for ever; he would never hear it again in the accents of joy or of sadness. He was alone in the world.

Lord and Lady Nairn came down from London to attend the funeral, and their presence afforded the laird some consolation. Nairn had his own reasons for appearing at

the funeral in a manner becoming his rank and station, and there was nothing in his appearance or equipage to confirm the reports which had been circulated about his embarrassed circumstances. He explained to the laird that he had left the army because soldiering was not suitable for a married man; and he had not yet set up an establishment in town, as they intended to travel for some months on the Continent. He treated Mr. Leslie on all occasions with marked respect, and the laird considered himself indemnified for all the sacrifices which he had made, when he could address his niece before the servants and others as Lady Nairn.

Poor Marion bore her honours meekly enough. It was remarked that she was thinner and paler than usual, but this change was naturally ascribed to the grief occasioned by her aunt's death; her altered position had effected no change in her manners, she was as affable as ever, visited her old friends the Kynochs, and spent a whole forenoon with Alice, who observed that she was even more affectionate than ever. She encouraged Alice to speak of the

time when she was an inmate of the cottage, and to tell her of Ninian's travels and adventures on the Continent. Alice was encouraged by her manners to put her arm round her neck and to give her all the proofs of endearment which had been common between them in former days.

"Marion, my own Marion, are you happy?"

"I do not complain, Alice. We all have our sorrows to bear, and no rank in life is exempt from them. If I am not so happy as you, it is because I am not so good."

"My only anxiety is about Ninian. His mind seems unhinged, and he has no settled purpose in life. Oh, Marion, if you had only known how much he loved you, and how he toiled to make himself worthy of you; there can be no harm in telling you now, when you are not likely ever to meet again."

Marion turned aside her head, and was silent, and Alice changed the subject. Mrs. Kynoch was somewhat stiff and reserved in her bearing towards her visitor, but Stormy Jack was hearty and cordial as ever. She was still his own Marion, the child of his

affections, and the daughter of his heart; no change of rank could make her different from what she had ever been to him.

It was found after the funeral that Mrs. Leslie had made a will, in which she bequeathed her jewels and other private property to her husband. The testator stated that it had been her intention originally to leave these articles to her niece, but that she had altered her mind, as she foresaw the probability of her husband being reduced to want through his imprudent generosity, and wished him to make use of them, if such an eventuality should occur. The laird was heard to sob aloud as this was read :—

“Poor Maggie, it was kind of her, but I’ll never need them.”

The dulness and gloom of Inverchewan Castle were little to Nairn’s taste, and he wished to leave as soon as decency would permit. Before leaving, however, he was heartless enough to endeavour to strip Mr. Leslie of the small pittance which still remained to him, and formed his only means of subsistence. The sale of his commission had afforded him little relief, as his creditors had seized upon most of the proceeds, and

unless he could prevail on the laird to assign to him the revenue which he still derived from the estates, he would have to return to London without resources of any kind. He had seen the miller repeatedly since his arrival at the Castle, and used every argument to obtain from him a loan, but that astute financier was obdurate. It was only when Nairn was about to leave him, that he suggested the idea of gaining Mr. Leslie's consent to transfer his rents to him under the promise that he would remit the money to him every year. If Nairn succeeded in gaining the laird's consent to this proposal, the miller was willing to pay down to him at once a sum equivalent to the value of the rents for three years, on condition that they were transferred to him during the period of Mr. Leslie's life. He was prepared also to advance 400*l.* at once, provided he could obtain Mr. Leslie's signature to bills for 600*l.*, payable six months after that date.

In making this proposal the miller was influenced, partly of course by a regard to his own interests, but still more by a spirit of revenge. Nairn was only too ready to accede to any terms which gave him an im-

mediate command of a considerable sum of money, and if he was successful in gaining over Mr. Leslie, the latter would be entirely in the miller's power. He would be stripped at once of the revenue which he enjoyed at present, and, as he would be unable to pay the bills when they fell due, there would be nothing to prevent the miller from expelling him from the Castle, and bringing everything which it contained to the hammer. His revengeful spirit luxuriated in the idea of seeing his enemy a wandering outcast, and himself in possession of the Castle.

Nairn seized the first opportunity to break this proposal to the laird, and strove to do so in the most plausible manner. He stated frankly that he was labouring under some temporary embarrassment in consequence of having embarked all the money at his disposal in certain mining speculations, the profits from which would be enormous. The shares had doubled in value, but as the mining operations involved an immediate outlay, a call had been made upon the shareholders, which he could only meet by selling part of his shares, and thus incurring great loss. If Mr. Leslie would come to his as-

sistance in the way he proposed he would be able to meet the demand, and to secure a larger share of profit. It would be his interest to do so, as his profit would be proportioned to the number of shares which the money he advanced represented.

This appeal to the laird's cupidity was unsuccessful. He was now an old man, and had no desire to mix himself up with any speculations which he did not understand; he had made an ample provision for his niece, and left himself little to support the dignity of his position; he was as little ambitious of increasing his income as he was of endangering it by ceding it to another. It was in vain that Nairn represented that there was really no risk; the laird listened to him with respect, but he refused to accede to his proposal.

Finding his first attempt unsuccessful, Nairn changed his tactics, and appealed to the laird's vanity. He represented to him that life must be very dreary at the Castle now that Mrs. Leslie was dead, and that he and Lady Nairn were anxious that he should take up his residence with them in London. It was true that they had not yet set up an

establishment in keeping with their rank, in consequence of the temporary embarrassment occasioned by his having invested all his money in the purchase of mining shares, and that their not having done so had occasioned much surprise in the fashionable world, but with a little temporary assistance they would be enabled to furnish a house in one of the fashionable squares, and to receive Mr. Leslie as one of the family. He would thus be able to enjoy the society of his niece, and to witness the admiration which her beauty and accomplishments could not fail to produce in the fashionable world.

This appeal was more successful. The prospect of living alone at Inverchewan had few attractions for the poor laird now that his wife was dead; even the society of the departed Leslies could not console him for her loss—it seemed to him at times as if some of those grim old faces mocked at his misfortune. His niece was now the only living being whom he sincerely loved, and who loved him in return; he was prepared to make any sacrifice to be able to enjoy her society in his old age, and to see her occu-

pying the position and surrounded by the splendour to which her rank entitled her. His own wants were few, and he was certain that his niece would repay to him in his old age the kindness which he had shown to her in her youth.

“You could remain here a few months longer,” said Nairn, “till we had everything ready to receive you; then Lady Nairn and I will return to the Castle, accompanied by my father, the Marquis of Menteith. We shall give a series of entertainments to your old friends in this quarter, and then take up your residence in London. As Lady Nairn is fond of the Castle, we could leave it in charge of the servants and spend a month or two here every autumn.”

“Well, my nephew,” said the poor laird, whose vanity never allowed him to forget that his niece had married a lord, “I suppose you must have it your own way. I am ready to do everything you wish, and to give up all that I have. There is only one thing I should like to mention. When you take a house in London, you must see that it is provided with a gallery where I can hang up my pictures, and show your grand

folks in London that the Leslie's can count kin with them any day. Besides," added the laird, with a simplicity which had something touching in it, "I have lived so much amongst them that they have become dearer to me than most of my living friends, and I do not think that I could be happy without them."

The idea of the laird expatiating to his visitors on the characteristics of the departed Leslie's was far from agreeable to Nairn; but as he never intended to afford him an opportunity of doing so, he was prepared to accede to everything which he proposed. He assured him that there should be a gallery large enough to contain all the Leslie's then in his possession, and such scattered members of the family as he might be able to pick up among the picture dealers in London.

Nairn then produced a paper, which the laird signed without even reading it. It was to the effect that he transferred all his interest in the Inverchewan estates to Lord Nairn, and authorized him to draw that portion of the rents which, on the occasion of his niece's marriage, had been set apart

for his separate maintenance. Nairn put this paper carefully aside, and requested the laird to sign two bills, which he assured him should be paid before they fell due, so that he would have no trouble connected with them. He took the pen and was about to attach his signature, when his eye happened to fall on the name of Adam Mackie, the miller. He started, and turned hastily round.

“What, my lord!” he said—“do you condescend to have dealings with such a man? He is a miser and a usurer, who has ruined many an honest man, and brought many a happy family to beggary. I should blush to see my name on the same paper with his.”

“Pooh!” said Nairn, carelessly, “it is a mere formality. You will never be brought into contact with him at all. I will pay the bills as soon as they fall due.”

“I do not like that man—he has always been an enemy to me and to my family.”

“You do him too much honour,” said Nairn, “by making him a person of such consequence. He is altogether beneath

your notice or mine, except in a transaction of this sort; and this, I hope, will be the last I shall ever have with him, or any one of his class."

"I hope so," said the laird, as he signed the bills. "We have an old proverb, my lord, that fools and their gear are soon parted; and, though it were far from me to apply such a name to you, yet it is hard to hold one's own when we have dealings with such men as the miller."

There was nothing now to detain Nairn at the Castle. He had accomplished the object of his visit, and was longing to return to London, to enjoy the fruits of his dishonesty. Marion knew nothing of the transaction: Nairn was aware that if she had known his intentions she would have put her uncle on his guard, and thus prevented him from being robbed of his only means of subsistence. Her sorrow at leaving him was softened by the hope of returning to the Castle next autumn, when he was to accompany them to London.

It was painful to Marion to think that he must then become acquainted with her husband's dissipated habits, which, from a

feeling of self-respect, she had hitherto concealed; but she was hopeful that his presence might have some restraining influence upon Nairn.

The expenses connected with his wife's funeral had exhausted the limited amount of money in the laird's possession, but this gave him little anxiety, as he knew that his annuity fell due in the course of a few weeks, and would, no doubt, be punctually remitted to him by Lord Nairn, who had now returned to London. He reduced his establishment to two or three servants who had grown old in his service, and used every economy that he might be able to receive his noble guest next autumn with becoming dignity.

He sought consolation for the absence of living society by spending much of his time among the grim faces which adorned the walls of his hall, and by planning how they should be arranged in the new gallery which was to receive them in London. He had heard that the pride of birth was as great in the south as in the north, and, no doubt, the reception of his niece in society would be more flattering when it was

known that she was sprung from a family so ancient as the Leslies.

Marion wrote to him twice every week. He expected that her letters would have been full of details regarding the furnishing of the new house—a subject in which newly married ladies are always deeply interested. To his surprise, Marion's letters made no allusion to the house or the furniture, and a feeling of delicacy prevented the laird from making any direct inquiries. No doubt his niece was meditating a surprise for him when he accompanied her to London—she intended that her new mansion should burst upon him in all its splendour, like Aladdin's palace. He observed that her letters were dated from one of the hotels in the West-end, where they had apartments before; but, of course, they were merely remaining there till they could take possession of their own mansion. As yet, he had no suspicions that there was anything wrong.

Weeks and months passed away, but still there was no remittance from Lord Nairn, and the poor laird began to feel the evils of poverty. He wrote repeatedly to

Lord Nairn, but his letters remained unanswered; at length he wrote to Marion, inquiring about her husband, when he learned with surprise that she had been alone for some time, in consequence of Nairn having been obliged to visit Paris on urgent business. A feeling of delicacy prevented him from telling his niece to what straits he was reduced, and as all her husband's letters were forwarded to his address in Paris, she had no means of learning it from any other source. It was well that she was left in this ignorance, as her own limited means would have prevented her from rendering him any effectual aid, and her own sufferings would have been aggravated by the knowledge that he was in a still more pitiable condition.

Still the laird made as bold a stand against poverty as if he had been defending the Castle of Inverchewan against the attacks of an enemy. He used the recent death of his wife as a pretext for refusing to receive society, or to accept invitations from his neighbours. Some one has truly said that the worst of poverty is that it renders a man ridiculous, and no one could be more

acutely sensible of this truth than the laird. He could bear his poverty without repining, so long as there were none to witness it, but he could not bear the idea that those who had envied him on account of the noble alliance which he had formed for his niece, should rejoice over him when they came to know that that alliance had proved his ruin.

He began to retrench by dismissing all his servants except one, who had been so long in the family that the laird could not find it in his heart to part with him. He gave as his reason for dismissing them that, as he was about to break up his establishment, and to reside with his nephew, Lord Nairn, in London, he no longer required their services. His limited means were still further reduced by the parting gifts he bestowed upon them, which were more in keeping with his social rank than the actual state of his finances.

The tradesmen of Islayhead who had been in the habit of supplying the castle, were surprised to find that they no longer received any orders, but the laird explained to them that he required so little now, that

he did not think it worth while to send so far, and obtained all that he wanted at the village shop. He sold his horses and carriage and was content to walk to church on foot, but he was at much pains to impress such of his tenantry as he met with the belief that he did so from choice, and not from necessity, as he had fallen into indolent habits since Mrs. Leslie's death, and had been recommended to take as much exercise on foot as possible. He had still his sixpence for a beggar, and there was nothing in his outward appearance or bearing to betray the true state of matters.

He paid frequent visits to Islayhead, and his former friends were surprised to find that he always found his way to the shop of Lazarus Levi, the German Jew, a man with whom he had never had any dealings before. The secret of these visits was divulged by Lazarus exposing in his window certain articles of jewelry, which were known to have been the property of the late Mrs. Leslie; but when some of the laird's friends expressed to him their surprise that he should have parted with these articles so soon after her death, he answered

with a sigh that the sight of any object which had belonged to his wife tended always to remind him of his loss, and that he could only moderate his grief by diverting his mind as much as possible from everything connected with her.

Poor old John Lawrie, his servant, was the only man who knew how matters really stood, but he had too much respect for his master ever to allude to the subject. Master and man supported themselves almost entirely on the produce of the garden, and the laird was eloquent in expatiating on the advantages of a vegetable diet, and the natural adaptation of water for the quenching of one's thirst. John was far from being a vegetarian, and, if he had a weakness, it was being over-fond of whisky; nevertheless, he was content to eat and drink as his master did, though he could scarcely refrain a smile at times, when he saw him making a virtue of necessity.

The quarterly payment of John's wages reduced the laird almost to his last shilling, and he was obliged to say, though the words well-nigh stuck in his throat:—

“John, you and I must part.”

“Whaur are ye gain’, sir?” said John, with an imperturbable air.

“I mean that you must leave my service.”

“Na, faith sir, I’ll no do that. If ye dinna ken whan ye hae a guid servant, I ken when I hae a guid maister.”

“John, I am going to tell you a secret, I am a ruined man.”

“Is that a’ your secret, sir? I hae kent it, and felt it too, for months, but, bless you, that is the reason why I wish no to pairt wi’ you. I hae been servant here, man and bairn, for mair than fifty years, and do you think I am goin’ to leave ye noo, as a rat leaves a sinkin’ ship? Na, na, sir, I’ll stick to ye. Cheer up, the best o’ yer days are a comin’.”

The laird was touched with the affection and fidelity of his ancient servitor, but all his entreaties to be allowed to remain in his service were in vain. He shed a few natural tears when John produced a small bag full of gold, the savings of his whole life-time, and begged him to accept it, shook him warmly by the hand, and told him that he could not accept his offer, or retain him as his servant, when he had no means of paying him.

“Oh! sir,” said John, in the bitterness of his heart, “if it had na’ been for that ne’er-do-well wha married your niece, we wadna hae been brought to this.”

“You old scoundrel!” said the laird, the current of whose sorrow at parting with an old servant was arrested by these disrespectful words; “leave my house at once. How dare you speak in such a way of my nephew, Lord Nairn? You and I shall not sleep another night beneath the same roof.”

The laird seized John by the shoulders, and pushed him gently from the room; he was glad of this pretext to get quit of him, for he could not bear that anyone should witness his poverty. It was not in his nature, however, to part on unkindly terms with one who had served him so long and so faithfully; so when John returned to say farewell, he shook him again by the hand, and promised to receive him back into his service, when he was in a position to do so.

Though John remained in the neighbourhood, he kept his master’s secret. He had, through the length of his service, become so identified with the family, that he would

have considered himself disgraced if it had been known how poor his master was. Still poverty, like murder, will out, hard as we may try to conceal it; the laird's artifices, and John's denials, failed at length to deceive anyone, and it was generally known that Mr. Leslie was a ruined man. *On trouve toujours quelque consolation dans les malheurs d'autrui*; the neighbouring lairds, with marriageable daughters, who had envied the elevation of his niece, and blamed his ambition, shook their heads, and said that they saw from the first what it would all come to; while among the fishermen, and his own tenantry, there was a general feeling of sympathy with the laird, which expressed itself in presents of fish and farm produce brought to the Castle. These were received by a strange servant, with a patch over his eye, who never opened the door, but took them in through the window of the hall; as he never exchanged any greeting with these stray visitors, or answered any question, or ever appeared in public, he was believed to be some one in the last stage of misanthropy, who had taken service with the laird that he might feast his eyes with

the sight of his sufferings. John Lawrie was the first who saw through the disguise, and discovered who the wearer of his old livery really was ; the sight of his old master, thus travestied, caused him deep sorrow, but he kept his secret, and affected to be deceived as much as the others.

Thus the laird continued for weeks to be fed, not exactly by ravens, like the prophet of old, but by the kind-hearted fishermen of Loanhead, who always selected a few of the best fish for the Castle, and by the poorest of his former tenants. His only consolation throughout these privations was the belief that they were known only to himself, and that his niece, Lady Nairn, for whom he had sacrificed so much, was surrounded with every luxury.

Their reverence for the Sabbath prevented the fishermen and the peasantry from bringing their usual presents on that day, which the laird was sometimes obliged to observe as a *jour maigre*, without having the merit of voluntary abstinence. One Sunday morning, he rose and found that there was absolutely nothing in the larder, not even a crust of bread to take off the edge

of his appetite, which was more than usually keen.

After service, he walked down to Stormy Jack's cottage, to inquire for Ninian. The family were sitting down to dinner, and Mrs. Kynoch invited the laird to rest himself after his walk. The pot, which contained the family dinner, exhaled a treacherous odour, which assailed the laird's nostrils, and through his nostrils his stomach. He asked Mrs. Kynoch, with dignified interest, what she had got for dinner, and when he learned that it was beef and broth, he delivered such a glowing eulogium on this national dish, that Mrs. Leslie was emboldened to invite him to taste it. A clean napkin was spread on a small table, and the laird partook heartily of the contents of the pot, and declared that he had enjoyed an excellent lunch, which proved that Mrs. Kynoch deserved her character of being the best cook in the village.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. McWYLLIE had no reason to repent his choice of Stirling, the schoolmaster, as successor to McNickam, the defunct sheriff's officer of Islayhead; his versatile talents and undoubted courage fitted him admirably for the duties of his office. His principal employer was the miller, who never failed to exercise all the rights with which the law invested him against the persons and the property of his debtors, and found a ready instrument in the ex-schoolmaster for the execution of all his designs. His new office must have been more lucrative than his former one, if one might judge by the improvement in his dress and appearance. He held also the appointment of parish constable, and proved himself the implacable enemy of all vagrants, tinkers, gipsies, and other vagabonds, who visited the peaceful locality of Islayhead.

There was a growing intimacy between him and the miller, and he usually visited the latter every morning to receive his orders for the day. On one of those occasions he heard the clink of the money which the miller was counting upon the table of his room, and had the curiosity to stoop down and peep through the key-hole. He watched him till he had finished counting the money, and observed that he placed it in an iron coffer, which he concealed beneath the bed. The sight of the money must have excited some new train of thought in Stirling's mind; he left the miller's house without being seen, and did not return that day. No doubt he suspected that if the miller knew that he had surprised his secret, their intimacy would be at end, and it was his interest to remain on good terms with him.

Meanwhile Madame Jacqueline, who was endowed with all the curiosity of her sex, had profited by Stirling's absence, to remove the hearthstone in the school-room, and continued her search till she found the bag with the gold which had been stolen from Nairn. She carefully replaced the

money and the stone, so that her husband remained ignorant of the discovery; the sight of the money had excited certain ideas in Jacqueline's mind; what these ideas were will appear in the sequel.

Four months have elapsed since Lord and Lady Nairn visited Inverchewan Castle. No remittances have been sent to the laird, who is reduced to the last stage of poverty, which he tries in every way to conceal. His niece, Lady Nairn, writes to him every week, and he has a proud satisfaction in informing the villagers that her ladyship is well. The noble lord, her husband, has been obliged to visit the continent on urgent business, the exact nature of which the laird is not prepared to divulge; but he expects a visit from both towards the end of autumn, and has reduced his establishment as he intends to accompany them to the south.

Everyone appeared satisfied with the laird's explanations, though no one believed them, and the conduct of Lord Nairn in ruining the unsuspecting old man was severely condemned. Meanwhile strange stories were circulated about his lordship;

at first they were whispered confidentially from friend to friend in the west-end clubs ; then they found their way, slightly disguised, into a few of the fashionable journals which cater diligently for the scandal-loving appetites of their readers, and last of all they reached Islayhead. It was said that a certain young nobleman, who was known as a more ardent devotee of Bacchus than of Mars, after having married a Scottish heiress, and dissipated her fortune, had basely deserted her and gone off to the Continent to escape from his creditors. No one ventured to mention these reports to the laird, who thought his niece's letters were sometimes written under depression of spirits, for there was nothing in them to lead him to think that there was anything seriously wrong.

He had now parted with all the jewels which had belonged to his wife, except one or two trinkets of trifling value, which he could not find it in his heart to sell. He had contrived hitherto to live by the sale of these articles, and by the gifts which his humble friends brought to the Castle. As

a last resource, he sold his gold watch, which had belonged to his grandfather, the grazier, and was of such large dimensions that few young men of the present day would have ventured to wear it, and was mortified to find that the sum he received was not at all proportionate to the value he placed on it. It was sufficient, however, to prevent him from starving for a few weeks longer, and he retained his dignity in the eyes of others by continuing to wear the chain with the gold seal and key attached to it. This ingenious device was sufficient to conceal the sacrifice he had made in parting with an old family relic, as no one would ever have taken the liberty to ask him what o'clock it was. It is possible that the dreary monotony of his life was somewhat relieved by these devices which he invented to conceal his poverty, but which in most instances deceived no one but himself. He was too much engrossed with the present to think much of future contingencies, and had forgotten that his first bill to the miller for 200*l.* fell due in two months.

At this time an incident occurred which

dispelled all his hopes of receiving any assistance from the south, and proved how delusive these hopes had been. One evening while he was walking in his portrait gallery and meditating in his own mind whether he could ever submit to part with any of those pictures which had cost him so much, his meditations were disturbed by a violent ringing of the door bell, and, on looking out, he observed a carriage drawn up before the door. He hastily disguised himself as a one-eyed footman; and even his intimate friends would have failed at first sight to recognize the poor laird in the livery of his old servant, John Laurie. A lady dressed in deep mourning stepped from the carriage, and, after paying the driver, dismissed him. The laird was surprised to receive a visit from a lady at such an hour, and thinking it prudent to hold a parley with her before admitting her to the house, he opened the window through which he was in the habit of receiving the different presents which were brought to him, and demanded her business.

The lady, who was deeply veiled, said that she wished to see Mr. Leslie.

The laird, observing several boxes lying on the steps before the door, indicative of an intention on the part of his visitor to take up her residence at the Castle, in the confusion of the moment was betrayed into a lie.

“He is not at home, and may not return for some weeks.”

“Then I shall remain at the Castle till he returns. I am his niece, Lady Nairn.”

The lady was startled by a sudden cry from the servant, who hastily closed the window and disappeared. Immediately after, the door was opened, and she was still more startled when the servant attempted to embrace her. She pushed him off, and, believing that he was drunk, threatened to inform his master of his conduct.

The poor laird, who forgot that he was disguised as a footman, and that he had just denied himself, wrung his hands, as helpless people do on any sudden emergency, and cried with a voice which could no longer be mistaken,—

“Marion, my niece, my daughter!—am I so much changed that you do not know me?”

Again the laird held out his arms; there was no resisting this appeal; Marion did not wait to ask any explanation, but threw herself into his arms and wept upon his shoulder. For the moment the laird forgot his poverty and his privations in the joy of meeting one whom he had ever loved as a daughter.

When Marion had sufficient command over herself to speak, she looked at the patch on the laird's eye, and said,—

“What is the matter, uncle? Have you lost the sight of your eye?”

The laird blushed with confusion, and stammering out some unintelligible words, rushed upstairs to his own room, from which he speedily returned looking like his former self; he took Marion's hand and conducted her to the room which she had occupied before her marriage. Leaving her for a moment, he returned carrying one of her boxes, which she assisted him in placing in a corner of the room, and requested him to leave the others till the servants could carry them up. On hearing the word “servants,” the laird shook his head sorrowfully, but said nothing; he sat down on a chair opposite his

niece, and observed with surprise the great change which a few months had wrought in her appearance. She had the air of one slowly recovering from a severe attack of illness, and her eye had that startled expression which is produced by some sudden and severe shock. When she removed her bonnet the laird started suddenly up, and said,

“Why are you here alone? Where is your husband, Lord Nairn?”

Even in that moment of great sorrow, when he had already anticipated her answer, he had a sort of pride in mentioning her husband by his full title.

“He is dead, and this is the last time his name must be mentioned between us. I forgive him, as I expect God to forgive me, and my only hope of happiness lies in forgetting the great injury he has done me.”

“Dead! I never knew that he was ill!”

“His death was in keeping with his life; he died of delirium tremens in a foreign land, and was laid in a stranger’s grave. Oh, uncle! I cannot tell all that I have suffered!”

Her overburdened heart was relieved by a flood of tears; she leaned her head on his shoulder, and gave free course to them.

The laird forgot his own sufferings through sympathy with hers, and waited till this paroxysm of grief was over before he resumed his inquiries. The reader is already acquainted with part of the sad tale which Marion told him for the first time. Nairn had cruelly deserted her, and gone to the Continent, leaving her without resources. He again tried his fortune at the gambling-table, but the same ill luck attended him in the Palais Royale as in London. Despair drove him to the bottle for consolation, and an attack of delirium tremens was the result. Before his death he contrived to write a letter to his wife, in which he confessed that he had been an unfaithful husband, that he had dissipated her fortune, ruined her uncle, and brought disgrace on the noble name he bore. Haunted by the remembrance of his past sins, and reduced to poverty in a foreign land, without a friend to help or to pity him, he was now suffering the penalty of his past guilt. When she received this letter he would have ceased to live; he had injured her too deeply to expect her forgiveness when living; all that he hoped for was that she would

not curse his memory when he was dead.

“As soon as I received this letter,” Marion continued, “I hurried to his father, whom I had not seen since our marriage. He was at home, and without waiting to be announced, I rushed into the room and showed him the letter. He motioned me to a seat, and I watched his face as he read it; it expressed neither sorrow nor surprise. When he had finished it; he folded it up carefully and returned it with a polite bow:

“‘I have long been prepared for this,’ he said; ‘I had some hopes when he married you that he might have become a different man, but I have been disappointed. I am glad that he has died abroad, where he was not known.’

“‘But, my lord, will you not accompany me to Paris?’ I asked; ‘I have no one to look to but you.’

“He shrugged his shoulders, and took snuff.

“‘Paris is very dull at this season of the year. I prefer London. I have always had a horror of the Morgue; the idea of it makes

me shudder, and I suppose he will be placed there to be identified. Faugh! I once passed by there, and I think I feel the smell of it still. I beg that you will not allude any more to such an unpleasant subject, and my advice to you is to lose no time in joining your friends in Scotland. Good morning.'

"He rang the bell, and politely bowed me out.

"I procured a passport, but when I reached Paris I found that he had been already buried in the unconsecrated part of the cemetery of Père La Chaise. As I wept over his grave, I forgave him all the injury he had done me.

"On my return to London, by selling my jewels, I was enabled to pay my own debts, and I gave up everything else, except a few articles of dress, to my husband's creditors."

"Oh, Marion—my own Marion!—my foolish pride and vanity have been the cause of all your suffering."

"No, uncle, you have sacrificed all that you had to secure my happiness. I could bear any privation—for poverty, you know,

is nothing new to me—but I cannot bear the thought that you have been ruined through me. What was the meaning of the disguise in which I found you? And where are all the servants? The house looks uninhabited.”

“Before you came, there has been no one in it for weeks but myself. Oh, Marion! I can bear any amount of poverty, but I cannot bear that others should know how poor I am. I have parted with all my servants, but it would never do for the idle gossips of the village to know that the laird of Inverchewan was acting as his own butler, cook, and housemaid. Old John Lawrie and I happened to be much about the same size (it was a sair fecht to pairt wi’ John, puir body!), so when any one comes to the Castle, I put on John’s livery coat and a patch over my eye, and, in this disguise, Maggie herself would not know me if she came back from the grave.”

“I thought you had still the annuity which was settled upon you when we were married.”

“No, Marion, I gave it up to your husband when he came down to my wife’s

funeral. He said that he had invested all your fortune in some mining speculation, the profits from which would be enormous, but that, meanwhile, he was pressed for money; in a word, I did all that he asked me—I even signed some papers, which are now in the possession of the miller, without reading them. He is my enemy, I know—and I hear that he boasts that I am in his power, but I have heard nothing from him as yet. Lord Nairn never sent me any money—he did not even condescend to answer my letters.”

“Oh, uncle, how sorry I am that you have suffered so much for my sake! If I had known that my husband was trying to get possession of your annuity, I would have made known his true character, which I formerly tried to conceal. His letters were always forwarded to him to Paris, so I knew nothing of this. How have you managed to live?”

“By dismissing all my servants, and selling my wife’s jewels; but I care nothing for myself, I am only sorry that a lady of your high rank should be obliged to share my poverty.”

“Oh, uncle, such words sound to me like mockery. You know that I was a poor cottage girl, accustomed to the roughest labour and the coarsest fare, till you raised me from my obscurity, and recognized me as your niece. If I had known all the misery that I was to bring upon you—but we must strive to forget the past. Would it not be better to sell the Castle, and to take a small house in Islayhead? I might then be able to procure some pupils, and to earn enough to support us both.”

“Never, Marion! If we leave the Castle, we must leave the country for ever.”

“What! Leave the place where you were born—where you have spent your whole life, and where you have buried your wife? The young sapling, when transferred to another soil, may take root and flourish, but the old tree, when transplanted, is sure to die.”

“I had rather be laid by poor Maggie’s side in the green kirk-yard than have the finger of scorn and pity pointed at me. No, I shall never leave the Castle, unless I am forced to do so; and when you succeed to it, after my death, you must never sell it

or the portraits of our ancestors, which I have collected at so much expense."

When Marion perceived that the laird had fully made up his mind never to leave the Castle she ceased to combat his resolution, and thought only how to make his home comfortable. She relieved him of all those household duties for which he was as little qualified as John Grumly, of whom it is related that he swore—

"By the licht o' the moon
And the salt faem o' the sea,
That he could do mair wark in a day
Than his wife could do in three ;"

and soon had reason to change his opinion, when he sent Mrs. Grumly to the plough, and took her place in the house. The laird had no such ambition, though it grieved his kindly heart to see his niece performing any menial offices. Marion, on the other hand, found her time so much occupied in this way that she had no leisure to brood over her past misfortunes, and the constant bodily exercise required during the day, gave a healthier tone to her mind than if she had had nothing to do. She felt that grief was a luxury in which she could not afford to

indulge, and strove to atone to her kind-hearted uncle for all the sacrifices he had made, by surrounding him with all the comforts to which he had been accustomed.

The small sum of money which remained from the sale of her jewels, after the payment of her husband's debts, was gradually expended, and the idea occurred to her that she might turn her knowledge of drawing and painting to some profitable account. She had excelled all the pupils at the *Maison Royale* in this art, for which she had a natural talent, and after her household duties were over, she would sit down beside her uncle and amuse him in the evenings by producing sketches of the local scenery, or, what the laird liked still better, by illustrating scenes in the lives of the *Leslies* of former generations.

The difficulty was how to dispose of them. Once and once only she had hinted at such a thing to her uncle, and the idea evidently caused him so much pain that she did not venture to allude to the subject again. She lived in the most complete isolation and retirement; her husband's death had been concealed by his family, and no one suspected

that Lady Nairn had returned to the Castle. The laird could not tolerate the idea of listening to the condolences of his neighbours, when they knew that his niece had returned with nothing of her former grandeur save an empty title, and, in her present state of mind, Marion had no desire to go against her uncle's wishes, or to make herself known by renewing her acquaintance with her former friends in the village. She was anxious to know about the Kynochs, and made frequent inquiries regarding them.

She learned that Alice was still alive, and that Ninian was expected home, having completed his tour with Mr. Hamilton's nephew. She had more than once hinted to her uncle that she should like to see Mrs. Kynoch at the Castle, but the laird had always found some excuse for not acceding to her wishes. The truth was that he doubted Mrs. Kynoch's prudence, and dreaded that if she had an interview with Marion, the secret of her return would be known to the whole village.

Apart from the natural desire of seeing one who had been as kind to her as a mother, Marion thought that Mrs. Kynoch might be

useful in aiding her to dispose of her sketches and drawings at a shop in Islayhead, the master of which dealt in such works of art, but, for the present, she felt that nothing could be done.

She sometimes walked out with her uncle at night, and visited her aunt's grave at Islayhead, and other spots which the associations of her childhood rendered interesting. On those occasions, they used every precaution so as not to be recognized, and Marion had, more than once, the satisfaction of passing through the village of Loanhead, and of seeing the light burning in Stormy Jack's window. She looked back with melancholy pleasure on the many happy years she had spent there, and longed to make herself known to her kind-hearted friends, and to thank them for all the kindness which they had shown to her.

One night, when they were standing on a rocky cliff, and admiring the long trail of silver light which the moon left on the calm surface of the ocean, they heard a footstep approaching, and, on turning round, observed a young man of gentlemanly appearance, walking along the narrow path

toward them. Marion drew her veil over her face and took her uncle's arm; the stranger started as he passed them, and stopped half short as if he wished to speak. He changed his mind and passed on, but Marion, though she had scarcely looked at him, knew almost instinctively that the stranger was Ninian Kynoch, and that he had recognized her. She said nothing of this discovery to her uncle, who would have been annoyed at the idea of their being known.

Ninian, having completed his engagement with his pupil, had returned to Loanhead, on a visit to his parents. Though he had not yet decided upon entering the church, he had not fixed upon any other profession, and he thought it better, in the meanwhile, to pass the Presbyterial examination, preparatory to entering the Hall as a student of divinity. He had given notice of this intention to Mr. Hamilton, who highly approved of it, and promised to introduce him to the Presbytery at their next meeting. After passing this examination, he intended to resume the charge of his pupil in Edin-

burgh, where he could, at the same time, carry on his own studies.

In the course of his Continental travels, Ninian was admitted to the best society at the different places they visited, and, besides improving his taste and enlarging his mind, he had acquired that ease and polish of manners in which he was previously deficient. He and his pupil passed through Paris, soon after Lord Nairn's death, but they had heard nothing of that event, which was known as yet only amongst his own friends. He had made every inquiry of Alice about the family at the Castle, and learned from her that since his wife's death the laird had dismissed all his old servants, and lived in the strictest retirement. It was said that he had been ruined by Lord Nairn, and the miller was in the habit of boasting that the Castle and all it contained would soon become his property. Much sympathy had been felt for him among his tenantry and poorer neighbours, who testified their good will by leaving different presents at the Castle, which were received by a surly old servant, who always denied that his master was at home. There was nothing

in the laird's appearance to show that he was reduced to such poverty, but he very rarely appeared abroad. Nothing was known of Lord or Lady Nairn, and he seemed to avoid all allusion to them. Ill-natured people said that he did so, because their marriage, besides involving him in ruin, had been far from a happy one.

The morning after Ninian had met Marion, he said to his sister when they were alone :

“Alice, I met Marion last night. You need not shake your head or look incredulous; I could not be mistaken. She was deeply veiled, and I did not see her face, but I knew her at once ; my heart told me who it was before I came near to her. You may smile, but I assure you it is true. In old times, before her marriage, I never ventured to look up at the pew where she sat, but I always felt in my heart when she was there and when she was absent. There was a gentleman with her, who, I believe, was her uncle, though he was not dressed as he used to be. You think I am mistaken—well, we shall see.”

Time and travel had softened, though

they had not altogether obliterated the feelings which Ninian had cherished towards Marion ; her marriage gave the death-blow to all his hopes, and he had struggled against a passion which had hitherto influenced his whole life, but which it would have now been sinful to harbour. He believed that he had vanquished it, and that he could now meet her without danger ; she would always be something different to him from all other women ; his attachment to her had exhausted all his capacity of loving, and he must now pass through life solitary and alone, haunted by the remembrance of all the dreams of his early youth, which were now dissipated for ever.

After his conversation with Alice, Ninian left the cottage and walked rapidly in the direction of the Castle. The sight of Marion (he was certain that he had seen her) had awakened many conflicting emotions in his mind, which gave him reason to doubt whether his victory over himself was so complete as he imagined. A thousand memories of the past rushed upon him and overpowered him ; he lived over again every eventful scene in which they had

borne a part; he thought of his long nights of toil and ceaseless brain-work; of the fond hopes he had indulged; of their bitter disappointment. He sought to subdue these violent emotions, and hastened along as if he wished to escape from himself, when, on turning a corner of the path which led through the wood, he stood face to face with —Marion.

It was Marion; but how changed from that Marion whom he had last seen in all the pride of youth and beauty. That young face was already stamped with an expression of sorrow, which told that she had passed through the deep waters, and had all but perished ere she reached the shore. He looked at her only for a moment, and then he turned away his head; his heart was too full for words. Marion remained calm and self-possessed; she betrayed no surprise, and was the first to speak. She knew that she could trust Ninian with her secret, and she felt the necessity of taking him into her confidence. She said nothing of her own sufferings, or of the circumstances attendant on her husband's death; but she told him

that her uncle was utterly ruined, and that she wished him to aid her in disposing of some of her sketches, to enable them to procure the means of subsistence.

Her simple story roused all that was generous in Ninian's nature; he no longer thought of himself, but only of Marion; he felt as a devout worshipper might feel in the presence of the saint whom he adores. All that was selfish in his nature was absorbed in sympathy for her sufferings. He could only stammer out "I could die for you!"

Marion believed him; but the question just now was not to die, but to find the means of living. He readily undertook to offer these sketches for sale at Islayhead; but he had already resolved that they should be his own at a far higher price than they would have fetched there. Fortunately, he was in a position to gratify the generous instincts of his heart, without exposing himself to any personal inconvenience. His employer had been generous beyond the terms of their agreement, and his salary still remained untouched.

Marion returned to the Castle and

brought back a few of the sketches on which she had bestowed most pains. She affixed a very moderate value to them, and Ninian promised to submit them to the dealer at Islayhead, and to meet her next day at the same place to inform her of the result. He never called upon the dealer, as he was afraid that Marion's secret would be betrayed, and he wished to retain the sketches himself, as his feelings towards the fair artist led him to attach to them a value far beyond their intrinsic worth.

Marion soon began to experience that soothing influence which ardent devotion to any pursuit exercises upon the mind, when labouring under any great sorrow. She was cheered by the thought that what she had hitherto valued as a mere accomplishment, was enabling her to procure the means of subsistence and many of the comforts of life for her kind uncle, to whom she owed so much, and her mind was gradually drawn away from preying on itself by the efforts she put forth to perfect herself in her art.

Ninian was the only human being, ex-

cept her uncle, with whom she had any intercourse. She had always respected him, and if they had not been separated at an early period in life, she might have been led to cherish toward him feelings of a warmer character. She now learned to appreciate all the better features of his character, which she had previously overlooked, and could not fail to be touched with his chivalrous attachment. He had too much delicacy of feeling ever to allude to that attachment; but Marion, with a woman's tact, soon divined his secret, and was only surprised that she had not discovered it before. Many things connected with his bearing toward her before their separation, which had not made any deep impression at the moment, now came back to her remembrance, and enabled her to perceive the true character of his feelings toward her from the first. If she had only known this before, how different her fate might have been, but it was now too late; the only return she could make for his love would be unworthy of his acceptance.

One day, when Ninian met her at the

appointed place to receive some more sketches, he found her deeply agitated, and, on inquiring the reason, learned that Mackay, the miller, had taken steps against her uncle, to secure payment of the first bill which he had signed at the request of her husband. She explained to him how Lord Nairn had persuaded Mr. Leslie to sign it on the promise that he would pay it when it fell due; he had never derived any personal advantage from it, and the matter had almost slipped from his memory, when he received notice from some creature of Mackay's, to whom he had transferred the bill, that, unless it were paid within three days, his goods would be distrained for payment. The laird had paid no attention to this notice, as he had no means of meeting the bill. This morning Stirling, the sheriff's officer, had taken possession of the Castle, and begun to make an inventory of the goods, preparatory to a sale. The laird was almost distracted, as Stirling had assured him that his portrait gallery would be swept away along with his other goods—a misfortune which the laird would have felt more acutely than all the calamities which

had befallen him, except the loss of his wife.

In this emergency, Marion wished to consult Ninian as to what should be done. He promised to use his influence with his uncle to grant some delay, if he could not persuade him to cancel the bill; but his knowledge of his uncle's character and of the revengeful feelings he had long cherished towards the Leslies, gave him little hope of success. Meanwhile, he proposed to accompany Marion to the Castle, and, on reaching the lawn, they found Stirling seated at the drawing-room window, with his legs distended on a valuable buhl cabinet, and his hands thrust into the lowest depths of his pockets. If any further evidence had been wanting to show that he considered himself master of the situation, it would have been found in the pipe and the pot of porter with which he was solacing himself after his labours.

When he saw Marion and Ninian approaching, he surveyed them with a sarcastic air, without changing his position. Ninian thought it better to see Mr. Leslie before speaking to Stirling, who, he knew, was

acting according to the instructions which he had received from his uncle. They found the laird walking backwards and forwards in the portrait gallery, as if he were keeping watch over the treasure which he valued more than all that he had ever possessed.

He did not observe Ninian at first—he was too much occupied with his own fears—too indignant at the insult which had been offered to his household treasures.

“Oh, Marion!” he exclaimed, with a rueful air, which showed how keenly he felt the wound. “What a barbarian that old dominie is! I thought the sight of these great men would have softened him, so I brought him to the gallery and began to describe them; he interrupted me rudely with, ‘Bah! a parcel of rubbish not worth a tinker’s curse!’ Yes, Marion!—the Vandal had the audacity to tell me that this valuable collection, which has cost me thousands, was a parcel of rubbish not worth a tinker’s curse—which,” added the laird, meditatively, “is, I suppose, the most worthless of all curses.”

Leaving Marion to console her uncle

under this unheard-of insult, Ninian returned to Stirling, and tried to persuade him to leave the Castle, until he had seen the miller, but neither entreaties nor threats had any effect upon him. He listened, pipe in mouth, to all that Ninian said, and then quietly answered that he was too old a soldier to leave his post without orders, and would take good care of the Castle, and of the young lady in whom he seemed so deeply interested.

“You scoundrel!” said Ninian—“if you dare to offer any insult to that lady I will break every bone in your body.”

“In your boyish days, Ninian, I have sometimes had occasion to bend your body over my knee, and to bestow upon you such flagellations as I believed to be good for your body and your soul. If I were not an officer of the law, engaged on public duty, I should be tempted to repeat the experiment.”

This insult was more than flesh and blood could stand. At a single bound, Ninian cleared the drawing-room window, and struck his old school-master with such force that he felled him to the ground. It

was, perhaps, fortunate for Ninian that the cabinet on which Stirling's feet had been reclining, fell heavily upon him, and prevented him, for some time, from rising. Meanwhile, Ninian hurried to the miller's to obtain some respite for Mr. Leslie and his portrait gallery.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Stirling regained his feet, and found that Ninian had disappeared, he indulged in sundry imprecations, which need not be repeated, and swore that he would be revenged for the insult which had been offered to him, an officer in the discharge of his duty. As he had finished the special task which had brought him to the Castle, and as there was nothing which demanded his presence there till the sale came on, he left, with the intention of complaining to his employer of the outrage which had been offered to his person. He had some idea that he might meet with Ninian on the way, as he had spoken of interceding with his uncle in behalf of the Leslie; in that case he would take the law into his own hands, and prove to him that his words

were something more than an empty threat.

Meanwhile, Ninian had reached the miller's house, and found him about to start on a journey in search of one of his debtors who had absconded. Ninian at once announced the object of his visit, on learning which the miller told him that it was useless to say anything in behalf of Mr. Leslie, as he was fully resolved to show him no mercy. On Ninian beseeching him to listen to him, he requested him to be brief, as he was about to start upon a journey, which might prevent him from returning for a day or two, and had no time to lose.

"I have never asked a favour from you," said Ninian, "though no one is better entitled to do so. You know I once saved your life, and nearly lost my own in doing so."

"I know it, Ninian, and I have not forgotten it. I have left you everything I have in the world, except an annuity to old Ailie, my housekeeper, who has served me long and faithfully. Though I say it myself who should not say it, I will leave you the

richest man in the parish ; but I should not die a happy man unless I left you the Castle of Inverchewan, as well as part of the lands. There is little now remains to the last of those cursed Leslies, and that little will soon be mine."

"Do you not know that revenge is forbidden by the law of God ?"

"I am not so much of a scholar as you, Ninian, but I know that the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations—and if it be right to visit them upon a child, it cannot be wrong to visit them upon a brother. I never see that man without thinking on his brother, who did me a mortal injury, and swearing to be avenged upon him."

"Mr. Leslie is not answerable for his brother's conduct ; besides, how can you expect forgiveness if you do not forgive your enemies ?"

"I am only an instrument in the hands of Providence," said the miller, with a hypocritical air, "for executing good and wise purposes. It is said that a haughty spirit goeth before a fall, and I never felt the truth

of that so much as when Inverchewan threw the snuff in his box into the fire, because my fingers had polluted it. I thought, Aha, my man, you will, maybe, be glad to beg a pinch some day from the miller's box, and that day is not far distant. The Leslies have had their day of triumph, and I shall have mine. They go far about who never meet."

"Think of Him, uncle, whose last prayer was for his enemies."

"I can only think of the irreparable wrong which has made me what I am—a rich miser, whom everyone fears, and no one loves. When I found out the great wrong which I had suffered, I made a solemn vow that I would be avenged on the Leslies, and that vow is part of my religion—I cannot give it up."

"It was a sin to make such a vow, but it would be still more sinful to fulfil it."

"I do not read my bible so; I find there that when we make a vow we should pay our vow, and I shall pay mine by selling out this Leslie, and leaving him to die in a ditch if he likes. I wonder, Ninian, that you would intercede for the Leslies, con-

sidering the treatment you have met with at their hands. When I felt your hand on the collar of my coat, when the smoke of the fire was suffocating me, I said in my heart, 'Ninian is a brave lad, and I am proud of him,' but I never thought you were so mean as to intercede for those who have used you so ill. The laird of Inverchewan would have scorned the idea of having you for his niece's husband. The day may come yet, when he will see that he might have gone further and fared worse."

"He never had an opportunity of scorning me—I never told him that I loved his niece."

"No; and he never suspected such a thing; he would never have believed you guilty of such presumption. On one condition only would I have foregone my revenge, but you would not consent to a clandestine marriage with Marion Leslie, so that spendthrift lordling got her. But why should I use hard words against him? He and I are only links in a chain—the means in the hands of a higher power for working out its purposes. The house of

Inverchewan is doomed—doomed to destruction, and it is useless striving against fate.”

“Show some pity to them in their sufferings, or the whole country will cry shame on you. Marion Leslie, whom you have known from childhood, has returned to the Castle, destitute and a widow. Her husband dissipated her fortune, and then deserted her.

“I am delighted to hear it; she is the daughter of the man who injured me, and the injury of the father shall be visited on the child, as is only just. Why should you intercede for those who are doomed to destruction? It would be a tempting of Providence. Surely you have outlived your boyish passion; you would not be so mean as to think of marrying a beggar, who refused you when she was rich.”

“She never refused me,” said Ninian, who lowered his eyes beneath his uncle’s searching look. “She never refused me, for I never asked her.”

“No, she never refused you, but she offered you a worse insult; any other woman would have seen your love, but she

never dreamed that you could have the presumption to dare to love her. I should despise you, nay, I should strike your name from my will this very night, if I thought that you intended to share my money with Marion Leslie, the beggared widow of a spendthrift lord."

"You may strike my name from your will, if you choose; I never asked you to place it there, and I could not expect God's blessing on wealth acquired by oppressing the widow and the fatherless. If you would save yourself from the remorse which such cruelty must entail, consent, at least, to grant them some delay. The sale of the Castle and the furniture will be more than sufficient to pay your debt, so that you will lose nothing."

"Yes; I should lose much—the pleasure of humiliating an enemy who is now in my power, and of accomplishing the great object of my life. If I were to die this very night, without having trampled on the pride of the Leslies, I should feel that I had lived in vain."

"May God forgive you, uncle, and show you more pity than you are disposed to

show to those who have never injured you."

With these words Ninian left his uncle, and prepared to return to Loanhead. He knew that Marion's presence in the Castle could no longer be kept secret, and he wished to provide an asylum for her and her uncle, so that they might be saved from the humiliation of being expelled from the Castle, or obliged to witness the sale. The idea occurred to him, after he had walked some distance, that if he had tried to soothe his uncle instead of combating his views and expressing his abhorrence of his conduct, his appeal in behalf of the Leslies might have been more successful; and, anxious that they should suffer nothing through his impetuosity, he turned back to renew his solicitations with his uncle in their behalf.

He returned to the miller's house, but found it shut up. He then went to old Ailie, in the housekeeper's room, and inquired whether her master had left. She informed him that he had only remained a few minutes in the house after they separated, and told her, on leaving, that his

business would probably prevent him from returning that night. There was no time to be lost—his business might be connected with the sale at the Castle—if he delayed, his appeal might be too late. As he could not speak to his uncle, he would write to him in the most urgent terms for a few weeks' delay—it might be that this would have more effect than their previous conversation. He requested Ailie to give him pen and paper to write a note to his uncle, but Ailie laughed at such a request. She had not put pen to paper for more than forty years, and the miller kept his writing materials locked up in his own room.

Ninian knew that there was no place near at hand where he could procure the means of writing to his uncle, so he told Ailie that he would call again next morning. As he was walking round the house he observed that the window of one of the garrets was open, and it occurred to him that he might easily climb to the top of the house, and effect an entrance. He would thus be able to write a letter to his uncle, and leave it with Ailie till he returned. He had no difficulty—thanks to his former experience as

a sailor—in reaching the garret window, which was large enough to admit his person; he descended the stairs to his uncle's room, and opened the shutters that he might search for a pen and paper. He found both in an old tattered portfolio which was lying on the table; a small key fell from it as he held it in his hands. He took no notice of the key at the moment, but after he had finished writing, his eye happened to fall upon it, and he was struck by its curious shape. He took it up to examine it, and all at once the idea occurred to him that this must be the key of the coffer in which the miller kept his money and valuable effects. He had once heard his father say that the miller kept his money in an iron coffer which was secreted somewhere in his room; he had discovered this by accident, and had never mentioned it to any one but his own children.

Ninian suddenly started to his feet. Why was this key placed in his way? Why was he reminded at this moment of a circumstance which he had previously forgotten? Might it not be that he was the instrument set apart for the deliverance of this oppressed

family, by obtaining possession of the bill which gave his uncle a hold over the little which remained of their property? If he could find the bill, he might keep it till the Leslies were able to leave the Castle and to find a home elsewhere; he would then restore it to his uncle, who would really have suffered no loss in consequence of its abstraction.

It was not difficult to find the coffer; the bed was the only place where it could be concealed, and after a brief search he discovered it, and dragged it into the middle of the floor. His hand trembled as he applied the key to the lock; yes, it *was* the key, the lock yielded to the pressure, and the coffer was opened. It was divided into two compartments, one of which contained gold, and the other bills and other papers of value. He hesitated for a moment whether he should not take as much gold as would enable Mr. Leslie to meet the bill, and thus preserve him from the danger which would still be impending over him. His uncle had told him that he would be the heir of all his property when he died, and it would only be taking possession a

little sooner of what must eventually be his. Still, he could not disguise from himself the fact that the money was still his uncle's property, and he could not carry off any part of it without being guilty of an offence forbidden by divine and human law. But it would not be an act of theft to abstract the bill, when he did so without any felonious intention, for the purpose of preventing an act of injustice; it would be only balking his uncle of his revenge, without injuring his property, or damaging his interests in any way. While these thoughts were hurrying through his mind, he lost no time in examining the different documents, till he found the one he was in search of. He examined the date and the signatures, so as to make himself sure that there could be no mistake, and when satisfied on this point, he folded up the bill and placed it in his pocket. At this moment it struck him that he heard a slight noise at the door of the room, which he had bolted before he began to search the coffer.

Was this the effect of an over-excited imagination, or was some one really watching him at the door? He stood and lis-

tened so intently that he could hear the beating of his own heart. There was a noise, as if some one had touched the handle of the door—it was so slight, that if he had not been straining to listen it would have escaped his notice. As it was, he could not be mistaken—there was some one watching him at the door.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he knelt down and applied his eye to the keyhole, and there, on the other side of the door, was an eye staring straight into his. The sight of this solitary eye watching his every movement, struck him with a kind of supernatural terror; he thought of that eye which neither slumbers nor sleeps, to which all things are naked and visible. So powerful was this feeling at the moment that if he had had time he would have restored the bill to its former place, but his only thought was how to escape. To open the door was to bring himself face to face with the owner of that mysterious eye, which he felt was still fixed upon him. The only other way of escape was through the window of the room. He opened it, and dropped himself to the ground, without

receiving any injury, and hurried off as fast as he could.

His mind was too much confused at first to allow him to think clearly. That solitary mysterious eye which he had seen so close to his own, seemed still to be following him; his only thought was how to escape from it. When the miller's house was no longer in sight he began to recover his self-composure, and to think more calmly on his strange adventure. He could not have been deceived, for he was so fascinated with terror and surprise, that he had stared at the eye for some time, without being able to avert his gaze from it. Who could it have been? It was highly improbable that any stranger could have found his way into the house through the garret window, and there was no other means of entrance. It must have been his uncle, who had returned unexpectedly, and finding the door of his room bolted from the inside, had tried to discover through the key-hole who was the intruder. But then, why had he not given an alarm? There was no one at hand who could have rendered him any assistance, if he had ventured to open the door and to disturb the

thief, and it was in keeping with his cautious nature to avoid giving any alarm, when by doing so he would have exposed his life to danger, without saving his property. He could see nothing in the room except those objects which were on a level with his eye, and it was possible, nay, it was probable, that he had not discovered that the thief was his own nephew. It was already dusk, and unless he had recognized him in the room, he could scarcely have recognized him after he escaped through the window.

This, then, was the conclusion at which Ninian arrived ; his uncle had suddenly returned, and discovered that there was some one in the house, without being able to recognize the intruder. It was possible that his suspicions might fall upon him, when he found that the bill alone was abstracted, and his other property left intact. Such was the flurry of his spirits, that, up to this point, he had forgotten the motive which led him to enter the house, and the letter which he had left in the room for his uncle. Well, it could not be helped, he was prepared to brave his wrath, but no threat that he could use should induce him to give up

the bill, till the Leslies had disposed of their property by a voluntary sale, and found an asylum elsewhere.

It had once occurred to Ninian's mind that it might have been a stranger who had found his way into the house, but, for the reasons already stated, he had at once dismissed this idea as untenable. If he had suspected for a moment that it was any one but his uncle, he would have returned and raised the alarm, as no stranger could have been there except with a felonious intention, but, as we have said, he had dismissed the idea as untenable.

When he reached his father's cottage, it was already dark. The moon had risen, but her light was obscured by huge masses of dark cloud which swept across the horizon; the wind had begun to blow fiercely at intervals, and the roar of the ocean became louder and louder as it dashed its waves against the distant breakers. The fishermen's wives and daughters were standing in groups at their doors, looking out in the direction of the sea for the return of the boats. They knew the roar of the savage, inexorable foe against which their

fathers and husbands had to contend, and that that roar was never heard without presaging danger and death. They stood there, calm and silent, hoping for the best, but prepared for the worst, with their arms folded across their breasts, and their heads slightly bent forward—groups of stout-hearted women, worthy of the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel.

Most of the boats had already returned, in anticipation of the coming storm, and no immediate danger was apprehended, as there would be ample time for those at sea to reach the harbour before it burst forth in all its fury. Stormy Jack was seated at his own fireside and conversing with his wife and daughter about the coming storm, which, he assured them, would be equal in violence to the one during which their schooner was lost, and part of the harbour of Islayhead destroyed. Many a brief, sincere prayer was offered up by those simple-hearted people in behalf of the sailors whose ships would have to weather the storm on that dangerous coast.

Ninian went to his own room and wrote to Mr. Leslie that he had obtained posses-

sion of the bill which was due to his uncle, and would undertake that he should have no trouble connected with it for some months to come; in the course of that time, he would be able to determine what was best to be done. Ninian promised to call the following day, and to see that they were no longer annoyed by the man who had taken possession of the Castle. Having finished his letter, he entrusted it to a messenger on whom he could depend, and despatched it to the Castle that night.

The storm increased with such fury during the night that it was impossible to sleep, and Ninian and his father rose at an early hour in the morning, and proceeded to Islayhead to ascertain whether any damage had been done among the shipping. They found the streets deserted, owing to the violence of the storm, and walked to the point of the pier, where they found a group of fishermen and sailors assembled. They learned from them that all the vessels which had made for the harbour had reached it in safety, and that there had been no loss among the fishing boats, as all of them had been able to return the previous

night, before the storm had burst forth in all its fury.

"What a terrible gale this is!" said one of the sailors.

"I have not seen one equal to it," said another, "since the day when the Oscar was lost."

"I am not old enough to remember that," said the first speaker; "but I defy it to be worse than the storm when part of the harbour was destroyed and fourteen of the workmen drowned. Stormy Jack cannot have forgotten that day, as, if it had not been for him, there would have been many more lives lost."

"I trust in God," said Stormy Jack, "that no lives may be lost this day; no ship could enter the harbour without a pilot, and no pilot's boat could put out in such a sea. Is that not a ship away there to the east, making for the harbour?"

"No, no," said the first speaker; "it is not a ship, it is only the top of one of the waves which you have seen against the horizon."

Ninian borrowed a glass from the harbour-master, and looked steadily out to sea.

"My father is right," he said, after a pause. "It is a large vessel of foreign build, with all sail set, making straight for the harbour."

"The captain must be mad," said Stormy Jack, "to approach the land, when his only chance of safety is in keeping in the open sea."

"Aiblins he wishes to do his owners a good turn; they may have assured the ship and cargo for more than their value."

"I pity the owners who would trust a ship to such a captain; he evidently cares little for his own life, or his owners' property."

"Hush! this is no time for joking," said Stormy Jack, "the vessel may have sprung a leak, and, in that case, their only chance of safety is in making for the harbour. That chance, however, is very small, unless the captain be acquainted with the coast. If he be a stranger, he and his crew may perish before our eyes."

"He has signalled for a pilot," said Ninian, who was still surveying the vessel through his glass.

"A pilot!" said one of that craft, con-

temptuously ; "the pilot must be tired of his life who obeys the signal. He must have a high opinion of the pilots of Islayhead."

"No pilot's boat could venture out in such a sea," said another. "It would be a sinful tempting of Providence, and would be of no use to those on board. The boat would be stranded as soon as it reached the mouth of the harbour."

"The captain must be aware of that. He has stopped signalling for a pilot, now that he has seen that it is of no use. He wished to pay a compliment to the pilots of Islayhead, and, having done so, he will now stand out to sea."

"Not he. He is holding on for the harbour, and in ten minutes more his vessel will be aground. He has lowered all his sails except the topsails ; but she comes shooting on like an arrow. May God have mercy on their souls !"

The vessel had disappeared for a moment in the cavity made by a huge wave. It was a moment of anxious suspense, and all the spectators stood with bated breath. The foam of the waves

swept over them with such fury that they were all as wet as if they had been immersed in the sea; and, yet, so steadily was their attention fixed on the exciting scene before them, that they were not aware of this fact. No one spoke; in truth the roar of the waves was so terrible as to render every other sound inaudible at the distance of a few feet. With their bodies bent forward and their eyes screened by their half-bent hands from the blinding spray, they peered into the whirling abyss, which seemed at times to threaten themselves with destruction.

The ship came steadily on till she was close to the mouth of the harbour, when she suddenly turned half round, presenting her side to the waves.

“She no longer answers the helm. They are lost.”

There was a half-suppressed groan among the sailors, some of whom turned away their heads. The words had scarcely left their lips, when a huge wave struck the side of the ship, swept her past the mouth of the harbour, and dashed her among the rocks beyond. They could hear the crackling of

the wood as their jagged points entered her bottom, and held her fast ; while wave after wave struck her in rapid succession, as if irritated at the resistance which she presented to their course. They could hear the creaking of the masts as they bent beneath the force of the water, which swept over the decks, and threatened the sailors with instant death. The bowsprit and one of the masts were loosened from their places, and broken to pieces among the rocks, and the other masts, on which the crew had taken refuge, could not long resist the violence of the waves.

Nothing was done to save them till Stormy Jack, whose manly heart was touched with a feeling of generous pity, raised his voice like a trumpet, and caused it to be heard above the sound of the waves.

“My lads, we must try to save them. We may lose our lives, but we can only die once, you know, and better die in trying to save others, than die when we cannot help it. Ninian and I are two, where are the other three?”

“I am not tired of life yet,” muttered one.

"It would be an act of suicide," said another; "no boat could live in such a sea."

"We have our wives and children to look to," said a third.

"In half an hour more the ship will go to pieces. If we do nothing to save them, God may refuse to hear us in the hour of our danger. Are there not three brave men amongst you?"

This appeal on the part of Stormy Jack was not unsuccessful—three men came forward, two of whom were pilots.

"You must not go, Mr. Ninian," said one of them, respectfully; "none of us may ever return, and it is enough if one be lost from a single family. Kelpie here will take your place."

"You are very kind, Yule," said Ninian, "but I must go; I cannot leave my father. There is no time to be lost."

The five men who were about to risk their lives, rushed to the place where the pilots' boats were kept; part of the sailors followed them, while the rest remained at the point of the pier, to watch the result. John Kynoch covered his face for half a moment with his broad bonnet, commended himself

to the care of Him whom the winds and the waves obey ; Ninian and the others followed his example. They then leaped into the boat, which was so violently agitated by the waves, that none but sailors would have been able to retain their footing in it. They arranged the oars, and took their places. Stormy Jack took the helm ; it was a moment of intense anxiety to the spectators, who scarcely expected that their comrades would return. Once or twice there was a cry that the boat was lost, when she was longer than usual in re-appearing on the summit of the waves ; but, after encountering many dangers, she reached the vessel, and Ninian, seizing a rope, managed to climb on board. He was followed by two of his comrades, and they lost no time in lowering the sailors, who were half dead with cold and exhaustion, into the boat. As soon as this was done, they pushed off the boat, and made for the land.

When they were about a hundred yards from the ship, one of the sailors, who had apparently suffered less than the others, suddenly exclaimed :

“ Where is our passenger ? ”

“He must have been left on board,” said another. “I saw him trying to force his way down the gangway, and he must have been drowned.”

At this moment, the rowers, whose faces were directed towards the abandoned ship, observed a man appear upon deck. It would have been dangerous for the boat to have turned back, heavily laden as she now was with the rescued crew. The stranger seemed to be aware of this fact, for without making any signal to the rowers, he hastily threw off the heavier part of his clothing, and plunged into the sea. It would have been an act of madness for any but the most skilful swimmer to have endeavoured to cope with the waves in such a sea, but the stranger struck boldly out in the direction of the boat, and the rowers lay upon their oars to watch the result. His great danger lay in being swept by the waves among the rocks, but he dived like an otter, whenever he was exposed to this danger, and appeared again when it was past. He was dashed against the side of the boat with such force that he appeared to be partially stunned, and he would have been swept past it, if

Ninian had not leaped into the sea, and supported him till they were both taken on board.

He soon recovered, and expressed his gratitude to his deliverers. He was a tall, handsome man, with a face bronzed by a tropical sun, and that indescribable something in his expression which told that he had once been a sailor. In a few minutes more they reached the land in safety, where they were received with cheers, which were heard above the roar of the waves, by the spectators. The rescued sailors were conveyed to the principal inn at Islayhead, where the stranger gave orders that they should have all their wants attended to.

The crew of the boat were detained by the stranger, who invited them to meet him at the inn at noon, as he wished to make the acquaintance of those who had saved his life, and to give them some proof of his gratitude. Ninian assured him that they had not risked their lives in the expectation of any reward, and that it would be more agreeable to their feelings if any sum he might have destined for them were distributed among the widows and orphans of Islayhead.

“Come and breakfast with me at noon, and we can talk the matter over. I belong to Islayhead myself, and I am anxious to hear all the news. It is more than twenty years since I left.”

With these words the stranger left them to procure from the landlord such articles of clothing as he required. Meanwhile, there were many surmises among his rescuers as to who the stranger could be; they talked over the names of all the sailors who had left Islayhead about twenty years ago, and tried to remember if any of them agreed with him in appearance. None of them could recognize him, and it was with no ordinary feeling of curiosity that they presented themselves at the inn at the appointed hour, where they found an abundant repast prepared, and their entertainer ready to receive them.

While they were at table, he explained to them how the shipwreck had occurred. The vessel had sprung a leak, and the captain, acting on his advice, had made for the harbour, which they might have reached in safety if the chain of the rudder had not broken.

"I am indebted to you for my life," he said; "but I owe you something more. In this pocket-book I have bills to the value of 40,000*l.*; it was below in the cabin when the vessel struck the rocks. I was unwilling to lose the earnings of twenty years, and, in trying to find it in the cabin, I nearly lost my own life. You see I can afford to be generous, and I wish to be so; I intend to spend the remaining part of my life in Islayhead, and I shall take time to consider in what way I can be most useful to you. Meanwhile, you will favour me with your names and addresses, and I will call upon you soon. As to you, my young friend," addressing Ninian, "I wish to have some private conversation with you."

He took a friendly leave of the others, who were rather disappointed at not having their curiosity gratified, and then turned to Ninian.

"I have nothing that I can give you just now, to mark my sense of your conduct, but this watch. Take it and wear it in memory of what you have done this day. I know that I am addressing a gentleman, and I shall be proud if you will grant me your friendship."

"I am not a gentleman by birth," said Ninian. "I am the only son of John Kynoch, usually known as Stormy Jack. Perhaps you may have heard his name before?"

"You could not be the son of a better father. I recognized Stormy Jack to-day, though he did not know me. We are old friends."

Ninian stared with surprise at this statement, but he restrained his curiosity, and the stranger proceeded to put a variety of questions regarding the family at Inverchewan Castle. Ninian observed that, while he listened to his answers, he placed himself in a posture so as to conceal his features. In a short time he had learned all that had befallen the Leslies in the course of the last twenty years; and when Ninian came to speak of Marion and her misfortunes, it struck him that he heard a suppressed sob.

After a few moments' silence, the stranger suddenly turned round and said,—

"Why do you take such interest in Marion Leslie?"

Thrown off his guard by the abruptness of the question, Ninian answered,—

“Because I love her, and have done so ever since I came to know my own feelings. My whole life has been a struggle to make myself worthy of her; but why should I talk of these things to a stranger?”

“If I had had any voice in the matter, you should have had her instead of that rascally lord; but, I have no doubt but my poor brother acted for the best.”

“Your brother! The laird of Inverchewan had only one brother, who died more than twenty years ago.”

“And who is come to life again this day; but it is a long story, which we must reserve for another occasion. We shall meet again soon, and you will find that I have not forgotten your conduct this day. I intend to drive to Inverchewan at once, to see a brother whom I have not seen for twenty years, and a daughter whom I have never seen at all.”

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Ninian left the hotel he found the people standing in the streets engaged in earnest conversation ; but he took no particular notice of this circumstance, as he naturally supposed that they were discussing the events of the morning. Nor did he feel any particular surprise on observing that their eyes were frequently turned towards himself, as he had taken an active part in rescuing the crew of the shipwrecked vessel, and he continued his walk in the direction of Loanhead.

When he had reached the outskirts of the town, he met Mr. Hamilton, Mr. McWyllie, and Stirling, returning from the direction of Loanhead. He was about to salute them and to pass on, when Stirling suddenly seized him by the arm, and said,—

"You are my prisoner!"

Ninian shook him off, and angrily demanded what charge he had against him.

"I am aware," he said, "that I struck you yesterday under circumstances of great provocation, and I am prepared to pay whatever penalty the magistrates may inflict, but I will not allow you to drag me as a prisoner through the streets of Islay-head."

"Calm yourself, Mr. Ninian," said Mr. McWyllie; "and do not offer any resistance to the officer, who is only doing his duty. You are apprehended on a far more serious charge than assaulting him. Your uncle, the miller, has been found murdered in his house this morning, and there are circumstances of strong suspicion against you. I, and all your other friends will be delighted if you can prove yourself innocent, but, meanwhile, as a magistrate, I have felt it my duty to issue a warrant for your apprehension. We would not wish to subject you to the indignity of being handcuffed, so I hope you will quietly accompany us."

Ninian stared at him like a man bereft

of his senses ; the only words which he understood were, that his uncle was murdered, and that he was apprehended on suspicion. He felt at once how difficult it would be to prove his innocence, when he remembered all the circumstances of the previous night, and thought of that mysterious eye which had haunted him ever since he saw it in his uncle's room. That eye must have been the eye of the murderer, who had secreted himself in the house, and committed the crime with which he was now charged. His head sank upon his breast, and he walked alongside Stirling without offering any resistance. Mr. Hamilton came up to his other side, took his hand and pressed it. Ninian was encouraged by this silent mark of sympathy, and returned the pressure.

"Do not loose courage, Ninian," said Mr. Hamilton ; "I have known you since you were a boy, and I believe you incapable of this crime. I will do all that I can to prove that you are so."

"May God bless you, sir, for those words," said poor Ninian, with a husky voice ; "I shall never forget them."

He never *did* forget them.

Ninian was lodged in the prison of Islay-head till the following day, when the witnesses were to be summoned and precognosed by Mr. McWyllie, whose duty it was, as procurator fiscal, to inquire into the circumstances of the crime. Before he was committed to prison his person was searched, and the suspicions against him were increased by the discovery of the bill which he had carried off, and had not thought of concealing. His arrest created great excitement in the town, where he and his uncle were well known. Little sympathy was felt for the latter, whose miserly habits and avaricious character were notorious; but there was a general feeling of sorrow amongst all classes that there should be any ground for suspicion against Ninian, whose generous courage in risking his own life that morning seemed irreconcilable with the idea that he had taken his uncle's the previous night. There are some people who, when they know nothing, always feel a secret pleasure in believing the worst; they, of course, shook their heads, and said they were very sorry, but they could not close their eyes to his guilt; the majority, however, believed

him to be innocent, though they could not account for the suspicious circumstances which had led to his apprehension.

The news was telegraphed from mouth to mouth till it spread over the whole country. A foolish neighbour rushed into Stormy Jack's cottage, and cried,—

“Oh, sirs! hae ye heard the news? Your Ninian has been ta'en up for murderin' the auld muller!”

Stormy Jack started to his feet and hurried the woman out of the house, but it was too late to avert the evil which her folly had occasioned. Alice gave a piercing shriek on hearing these words, and fainted in her mother's arms. It was long before she was restored to consciousness, and they had reason to fear that the shock had proved too much for her weakened frame. It was well, perhaps, that Alice required so much of their care, as it diverted their thoughts from the disgrace which had been brought upon them by such an unfounded charge. They never doubted for a moment that Ninian was innocent, and that he would soon be released.

Marion's father, after parting with Ninian, had ordered a carriage and driven straight to Inverchewan Castle; he knew nothing of the charge which had been brought against his young friend, till the following morning. We pass over his meeting with his brother and his daughter, whom he now saw for the first time, as the interest of our tale now hangs on the fate of Ninian, who is, strictly speaking, its hero. It may be sufficient to mention that, feeling he had disgraced his family by the marriage which he had contracted with one so far beneath him in rank and birth, he had accepted the command of a merchant vessel, and, after several voyages, had settled in one of the islands in the Indian Ocean, where he established himself as a merchant, and being successful in business, had amassed a considerable fortune. Soon after he had settled in this Island, he heard, indirectly, of his wife's death, without learning that she had given birth to a daughter; and losing all interest in his family and the place of his birth he had made up his mind to live and die in the island of his adoption. It happened, however, about a year before the events re-

corded in the previous chapter, that a ship was consigned to him, the captain of which was a native of Islayhead, which he had recently left. He invited him to his house, and in the course of conversation discovered that his wife had given birth to a daughter, who had been adopted by the laird of Inverchewan after the death of his own son. When he learned that he was a father, he was seized with an irresistible longing to see his unknown daughter, and, after settling his affairs, he embarked for his native land, and had all but reached the place of his birth when the ship was overtaken by the storm which almost proved destructive to him and all on board.

As he related the circumstances of the shipwreck, and spoke in glowing terms of admiration of Ninian's bravery in saving his life, he watched his daughter's face, to observe the effect produced by his words, and was pleased to find, from her heightened colour and trembling lips, that the subject was not without interest to her. When they were alone, he implored her forgiveness for the apparently unnatural part which he had acted towards her, and

expressed a hope that she might yet come to love him as a father, when she found how anxious he was to atone for his past neglect. Marion could only answer with her tears; she had always believed herself to be an orphan, and the discovery of her long-lost father awoke feelings in her heart to which she had been hitherto a stranger. In the course of a few hours, he had learned from her the leading events of her past life, and the shifts to which they had been reduced to obtain the means of subsistence. She was telling him what kindness they had met with from Ninian during their trials, and showing him the letter which he had written to her uncle the previous evening, when the laird joined them. He was deeply agitated, and betrayed more emotion than Marion had ever seen him exhibit before.

“Marion, I have sad news for you. That poor lad, Kynoch, has been guilty of a great crime, in trying to save us from ruin. You know the contents of that letter, which Frank is holding in his hand. Well, his uncle, the miller, was found murdered yesterday morning, and Ninian has been taken up on suspicion. The bill alluded to in the

letter was found in his possession, and Mr. McWyllie, who is my informant, says it will go hard with him, as he never heard of a stronger case of circumstantial evidence."

On hearing these words, Marion clung to her father for support, but, in a minute or two, she recovered her composure, and implored them to use their influence to save his life, as she was convinced that he was innocent. Her uncle and her father looked doubtfully at the letter, and she marked their rising suspicions, and resolved that she herself would undertake the task from which they shrank, and use every effort to prove that Ninian was innocent.

"You do not know him as I do," she said, "or you would not suspect him. I know that he loves me, and that he has ever done so, but not even his love for me would have impelled him to commit such a crime. He is the victim of some foul conspiracy, and that bad man, who provoked him to strike him, is at the bottom of it. May God help me! I am only a poor, weak woman, and can do but little, but all that I can, I *will* do to aid him in his danger. I must see him this very day, and

tell him that, whatever others may think, I believe him to be innocent."

"We shall all go together," said the laird; "but might it not be as well to destroy the letter?"

"No," said Marion, firmly; "we will use only honest means in his defence, otherwise we cannot expect the blessing of God."

When they reached Islayhead, they found that the precognition of witnesses was to be conducted privately in the court-house, but as the laird was a magistrate, he was entitled to admission, and he had little difficulty in introducing Marion and her father. They were almost the only spectators in the court, except the witnesses who were to be examined, and when they entered, they found the magistrates seated on the bench, and Ninian standing before them. When he saw Marion enter the court, he turned away his head for a moment, but he soon regained his composure; as she passed him, she pressed his hand, and said, "I know that you are innocent; put your trust in God—all will yet be well." There was a world of tenderness and gratitude in the look which Ninian gave her in return; he had faith in her

words, and from that moment he never doubted that he would be acquitted of the crime with which he was charged.

It appeared, from the evidence of the different witnesses examined, that Ninian was the last person who had been seen in company with the miller. The latter had told old Ailie, his housekeeper, after parting with Ninian, and before leaving his own house, that he was about to visit one of his debtors, who lived at some considerable distance, and that he probably would not return that night. It was shown by this man, who was present, that, though he had received a letter from him, in which he mentioned that he would call upon him that night for the payment of the sum which he owed him, he had not made his appearance; and it was probable that he had changed his mind, and turned back on finding that he could not reach the place till a late hour. Old Ailie, though she was evidently an unwilling witness, and strongly protested her belief in Ninian's innocence, was obliged to admit that he had returned to the house after the miller left, and had asked her for pen and paper, as he wished to write to his

uncle on a matter which admitted of no delay. But the evidence of Stirling bore harder against Ninian than that of any of the other witnesses. He commenced by stating that he had always believed Ninian to be a dangerous character, and that he had reason to believe that this was not the first crime of which he had been guilty. Lord Nairn, a short time before his marriage with the amiable lady whom he saw in court, had been attacked by the accused one night when they were returning from Inverchewan Castle, and robbed of a large sum of money. Surprised at this statement, and indignant at the *animus* which this witness showed to the accused, Marion rose and said,—

“It is false. Lord Nairn was never robbed, and the accused is as free from that crime as he is innocent of the one with which he is now charged.”

“I appeal to his honour, Mr. McWyllie,” said Stirling, “whether he did not consult me about this robbery, and whether it was not the opinion of both that Ninian Kynoch was the guilty party.”

“There is no question before this court,”

said McWyllie, "about the robbery of Lord Nairn, or any other man, and the witness must confine his evidence to the matter in hand."

Stirling, having attained his object, which was to prejudice the minds of the other magistrates on the bench against Ninian, then resumed his evidence.

On the night when the murder was committed he had been at Inverchewan Castle on a matter of business, and saw the accused there. Without any provocation on his part, he had made a violent attack upon him; he had reason to believe that the object of that attack was to obtain possession of a large sum which was due to the miller, and which he had employed him to collect. As soon as he had recovered from this attack he left Inverchewan Castle to return to his own home, and he had occasion to pass within a few hundred yards of the miller's house, which stood some distance off the road. It was already dark when he reached this part of the road, but not so dark but that he could distinguish any object at a short distance. When opposite the miller's house, he saw some

person leap from a window, and rush forward in the direction of the place where he stood. He could swear that that person was the accused—he could not be mistaken as to his identity. He recognized him at once, and dreading a second attack, he crouched down at the side of the wall which bounded the road, so that the accused passed within a few yards of him without observing him. He had a wild, excited look, and was running as if he dreaded that some one was pursuing him. He considered his conduct suspicious, but it never occurred to him that he could have attempted the life of his uncle, who was a weak, defenceless old man; and, besides, he could not conceive any motive for such a crime, as he knew that the miller intended to leave him all his property. He called at the miller's house the following morning, as he was in the habit of doing, to receive orders for the day, when he was informed by the housekeeper that he had not returned. Moved by a feeling of curiosity, he walked round the house to examine the window, from which he had seen the accused escape the previous night. It was the window of

the miller's bed-room, and he found it still open. As the room was on the ground-floor, he had no difficulty in looking through the window, and on doing so, he was horror-struck to see the miller stretched on the floor, apparently lifeless, and the different articles of furniture scattered about and broken, as if there had been a severe struggle. He did not enter the room, nor, when the alarm was given, did he allow anyone else to enter it. Believing that a great crime had been committed, he despatched a messenger to Islayhead, to inform the Procurator Fiscal of what had occurred, and waited till that official returned. He was present when he broke into the room. The miller was lying on his back in the middle of the floor, and to judge by the appearance of the body, which was stark and stiff, he must have been dead for about twelve hours. As an old soldier, who had been present at many a battle, and assisted in burying the slain, he had some experience in such matters, and could give a confident opinion, though, no doubt, the medical man who had examined the body was better able to judge. Though there were no external wounds on

the body, it was evident that death had been the result of violence. The tongue was swollen, and protruding from the mouth; the eyes were projecting from their sockets, the hands were clenched together with such force that it was impossible to open them, and the throat was covered with livid spots. All these appearances went to show that the unfortunate man had been strangled, after a severe struggle. That the struggle had been severe, was evident from the overturned table, the broken chairs, and the general state of the room, the appearance of which, as well as of the body, was utterly inconsistent with the idea that death was the result of natural causes, or that the miller had laid violent hands on himself. If any further evidence had been required to prove that a foul crime had been committed, it would have been found in the miller's iron coffer, in which it was known that he always kept a large sum of money and his most valuable papers, being found open, and robbed of all its contents.

Mr. McWyllie confirmed Stirling's evidence as to the state of the body when found, and the appearance of the room

when they entered it. In consequence of the statement which the previous witness had made, he had felt it his duty to issue a warrant for the apprehension of Ninian Kynoch, as the murderer of his uncle. It was the most painful duty which he had ever been called upon as a magistrate to discharge, as he had known the accused from boyhood, and had always entertained a high opinion of him. With regard to the charge of having robbed Lord Nairn, he believed that it was utterly groundless; if his lordship was robbed at all, he was convinced that the accused was not the thief. He thought it right to make this statement, that the minds of his brother magistrates might not be prejudiced against the accused.

There was one circumstance, however, which bore hard against the accused: when he was apprehended on this charge, and brought to the court-house, he had given orders that his person should be searched, and this bill had been found in his possession. He would be able to prove, at a future period, that this bill was the miller's property, and formed part of the papers which had been carried off from the iron coffer.

This closed the evidence against the accused, who was warned by the magistrate that any statement he made might be used in evidence against him. Undeterred by this warning, Ninian solemnly protested his innocence, and proceeded to give an account of all that he had done on the night of the murder. He admitted that he had struck Stirling, but denied that he had any intention to rob him; the attack had been provoked by an insult which had been offered to him, and which, in the heat of the moment, he could not avoid resenting. This circumstance might explain the *animus* which this witness had shown in trying to turn everything against him, and accusing him of a crime which had no connection with the present charge. He appealed to Mr. McWyllie whether there were not circumstances known to him which tended to prove that Stirling had robbed Lord Nairn, and artfully tried to father the guilt upon him, and expressed his belief that he was playing the same part on the present occasion.

Here the magistrates interfered, and reminded him that he must confine his statement to such circumstances as might serve

to exculpate himself, without bringing vague charges, which he could not substantiate against another.

Ninian bowed to the decision of the bench, and resumed his narrative. He said that nothing but the desire to bring the guilty to justice could have induced him to touch on circumstances connected with the private affairs of a gentleman whom he now saw on the bench ; he alluded to Mr. Leslie of Inverchewan. There had never been any pecuniary transactions between Mr. Leslie and his uncle ; but Lord Nairn had persuaded the former to sign a bill, which he promised to pay when it fell due. In consequence of the death of that nobleman the bill was not paid, and his uncle had at once taken legal steps to enforce payment by employing Stirling to take possession of the Castle, and to make preparations for a sale. It was in consequence of his insolence, while thus in possession, that he had so far forgotten himself as to strike him, and, after leaving the Castle, he went straight to his uncle's house, for the purpose of interceding with him, and trying to induce him to stop proceedings against Mr. Leslie,

who had never received any equivalent for this bill. He found his uncle at home, but failed to divert him from what he found to be a scheme of vengeance, which he had long cherished on account of some injury which he had received at the hands of a member of the Inverchewan family. Despairing of being able to alter his uncle's resolution, he left him, after having learned that he was about to visit a distant part of the country, and did not expect to return that night.

Anxious to make a last effort in behalf of those who were the victims of his injustice, he returned to the house with the intention of writing a letter to his uncle, but found that the housekeeper could not supply him with the means of doing so. He then described how he managed to enter the house, and detailed all the circumstances with which the reader is already acquainted. When he mentioned that he had written a letter to his uncle, Mr. McWyllie interrupted him by asking him what had become of that letter?

Ninian said that he had left it on the table in his uncle's room.

Mr. McWyllie inquired whether any such letter had been seen by the officers of justice, who had examined the room after the discovery of the murder, but none of them had seen the letter, and they were all convinced that if it had been in the room, it could not have escaped their notice. All the magistrates looked grave and shook their heads, except Mr. Leslie, who was still overpowered with confusion at the revelation of his embarrassed circumstances, and the indignity which had been put upon him.

Ninian solemnly declared that it was with no felonious intention that he abstracted the bill; his only object was to stay proceedings, and to procure some delay, till Mr. Leslie had completed his arrangements for leaving the Castle. The eye which he saw through the keyhole, and which had caused him so much terror, must have been the eye of the murderer, who had made his way into the house and was watching his movements. On making his escape through the window, he had left the coffer open, with all the gold and the papers which it contained displayed to the eye of any one who entered the room. He could only

account for the murder by supposing that his uncle had unexpectedly returned and disturbed the thief before he had been able to carry off the contents of the coffer, and that he had met with his death in the contest which ensued.

He concluded by appealing to Mr. Leslie whether he had not received a letter from him that same night, to the effect that he would be relieved from all annoyance, as the bill was in his possession ; and by asking whether it was likely that he would have written such a letter, or retained the bill on his person, if he had been his uncle's murderer, or had even known that he was murdered.

During Ninian's address the poor laird had been agitated by conflicting emotions. It was not without a feeling of humiliation that he heard his embarrassments revealed in open court before his brother magistrates ; and even at this critical moment, when the life of one whom he believed to be innocent, and who had exposed himself to his present danger through his desire to befriend him, was at stake, he could not divest himself of his foolish pride so far as

to admit the truth in all its naked and revolting reality. He produced Ninian's letter, and warmly expressed his belief in his innocence; his only subject of regret was that he should have interfered in the matter at all, as he could easily have paid the bill, if he had not considered himself bound to resist payment, inasmuch as his signature had been obtained by improper means. The laird sat down in some confusion, only half satisfied with the salve which he had administered to his wounded self-esteem, but confident of the success of an explanation which deceived no one but himself.

The prisoner was removed and the court cleared, while the magistrates deliberated in private as to what should be done. McWyllie was the only man of business amongst them, and they were in the habit of bowing to his superior judgment. He went over the leading facts of the case, and showed that, whatever their private opinion might be as to Ninian's innocence or guilt, the circumstances against him were so suspicious that the only course for them to pursue was to commit him to prison on the

charge of wilful murder. The other magistrates sorrowfully acquiesced in this view of the case; even Mr Leslie, though convinced that Ninian was innocent, was obliged to yield to the force of circumstances, and to signify his assent.

Ninian was recalled, and the decision of the magistrates was read aloud in his hearing. He bowed respectfully to the bench, without offering any remarks upon their decision, which he himself felt was fully justified by the evidence, and he was then conducted to prison, to await his trial. The two lords of session, set apart for that special work, were to hold a court for the trial of criminal cases, at the county town, in about six weeks. It was some consolation to Ninian to think that his imprisonment could not be of long duration, and he was hopeful that circumstances might occur to clear him from suspicion before the trial came on.

There was one friend of Ninian's who had witnessed, with deep anxiety, all that had passed in the court-house. Marion's father, not being a magistrate, was not entitled to take any part in the proceedings of the

court; but when he was introduced by Mr. Leslie to his friends on the bench, after the business of the day was finished, he told them, with sailor-like frankness, that he entirely dissented from their decision, and that Ninian Kynoch was as innocent of his uncle's death as he was. He spoke with warm gratitude of what he had done during the shipwreck, and declared that the life which he had saved should be devoted to the assertion of his innocence. He went a step farther: he expressed his belief that the ill-looking scoundrel who had tried to swear Ninian's life away, was himself the murderer, and that he would leave no stone unturned to prove him guilty of the crime.

Ninian's new friend was a man of his word. Before leaving Islayhead he wrote to him that he was convinced of his innocence, and would spare no effort to obtain his release, by tracing the crime to the real murderer, who, he believed, had given evidence against him that day. He called, with Marion, at Stormy Jack's cottage, and comforted the inmates with the assurance that Ninian would soon be released. These poor people would have been delighted at

any other moment to have welcomed back one who had once been as a daughter to them, and whom they had always loved; but in the great and sudden sorrow which had been brought upon them they expressed no surprise at her presence, and seemed to have forgotten that she had ever left the Castle. Marion, with the consent of her father, who knew how much she owed to the fisherman's family, resumed the place in the household which she had formerly occupied; and Lady Nairn, fitted by her talents and accomplishments to grace the *salons* of the highest and noblest in the land, found a purer happiness than she had ever done before, in waiting by the bedside and ministering to the wants of a dying girl—the daughter of a fisherman.

For Alice was dying—dear, gentle, uncomplaining Alice—whose whole life had been a slow death, and whose pure spirit had long been hovering on the confines of that world of spirits on which she was about to enter. The shock of her brother's apprehension had been too much for her weakened frame; it completed the work which slow, unrelenting, incurable disease had long

been carrying on. She suffered no pain, but she never rallied; the nearness of death had no terrors for her, it was a fact with which her mind had been daily familiarized, and when the inexorable foe approached, she welcomed him as a friend.

There was no reserve now between her and Marion. All the past, since Marion left, seemed to be forgotten, and there was the same freedom of intercourse between them as before. It was then that Marion learned the depth and the intensity of the passion which Ninian had felt for her, and which had roused him to such noble efforts to render himself worthy of her love. Both were convinced of his innocence, though they could not account for all the circumstances attendant on the miller's death.

At first a horrible suspicion had taken possession of Marion's mind. When she heard of the murder, after receiving Ninian's letter, she dreaded that his uncle might have returned before he had left the house, and thus met with his death in the struggle which would naturally have ensued, but when she listened to Ninian's statement in the court-house, her suspicions were at once

dispelled, and she was satisfied that he was not the murderer. Women are often more acute and subtle reasoners than men, though they cannot state logically the different steps of the process by which they have arrived at their conclusions, and are thus more liable to defeat when they engage in argument with the other sex; and it was singular that Marion and Alice, without consulting one another, had both made up their minds that Ninian was innocent, and that Stirling was the murderer.

They would have found it difficult to convince a jury of this fact, as they were obliged to admit to themselves that not a single circumstance had been adduced in the evidence which tended to throw suspicion upon Stirling, whereas there were several which bore hard against Ninian, and might prejudice strangers against him. Marion trembled as she thought of the result of a trial, and experienced something of self-reproach as she remembered that it was for her sake that Ninian had incurred the foul suspicion of murder, and exposed himself to the risk of an ignominious death. She was touched with his manly and de-

voted attachment, and felt that she was bound to do everything in her power to prove that she was not unworthy of all that he had done for her. If only his innocence could be asserted, and his character cleared from this fearful charge, she was prepared to share his lot in life and to make him the master of that heart, to win which had been with him a life struggle.

She told Alice all that was passing in her heart, and it soothed the dying girl to know that her brother had not loved in vain.

"I shall not live to see it, Marion," she said; "but there is something in my heart which tells me that, after this great trial is over, there will be many happy days in store for both of you. I think I should like to live till I saw Ninian free, and you and him united for life, but as that cannot be, I think that I have got the assurance of your future happiness from a higher power, to console me. I cannot tell how the conviction has been imparted, but I do feel convinced that Ninian's innocence will be made clear as the noon-day, and that you, Marion, will be the means of saving his life."

“He once told me, Alice, that he could die for me, and I little thought that his words would be put to such a test. What is there that I would not do to save him? My father owes to him his life and his fortune, and I am sure that he will do everything that can be done; but what can I do, Alice? I can only mingle my prayers and my tears with yours.”

“Nay, Marion, you can do more than weep or pray. That bad man, Stirling, is the murderer, and it is you alone who can trace the crime home to him. Make the acquaintance of his wife; she is a French woman, and you can talk to her in her own language. She has no friends in the village, and must be very lonely. Visit her often, and talk to her about the murder; who knows but your intercourse with her may lead to some discovery? It may seem strange to you, but I believe that you alone can save Ninian’s life; it was for your sake that he exposed it to danger, and through you he can be delivered from that danger.”

“I will do as you advise, Alice. I have sometimes heard that the spirit, when it is

about to be unloosed from the body, sees farther into the future than at other times, and who knows but the veil has been drawn aside for a little, to comfort you with a glimpse of what shall be? I think that Ninian and I would meet on more equal terms, if I were the means of saving his life."

"Act as if you believed that you *are* the means; have faith in yourself, and in the task which has been assigned to you; above all, have faith in Him with whom are the issues of Life and Death. He alone can give efficacy to our feeble efforts; our extremity is His opportunity, and it will prove to be so in this case. I have no undue anxiety about you and Ninian; I feel that all will yet be well. My father and mother will be very lonely when I am gone. Ninian has always been a good son, but he will have new ties. Will you promise, Marion, to be kind to the old people?"

"I will strive to be to them all that you have been, Alice—a good, dutiful, and affectionate daughter; not even my own father has such claims upon me as they have."

"They have always loved you as a daugh-

ter, Marion, and you will be dearer to them than ever, when I am gone."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Hamilton, and Alice was left alone with him. Their previous intercourse had been so intimate and so frequent, that Alice looked upon him as a friend to whom she could freely relate all that had been passing in her mind, and she was pleased to find that he shared her belief in Ninian's innocence, and listened with attention while she told him of her deeply-rooted conviction that Marion would be the instrument of his deliverance. It is possible that Mr. Hamilton did not share in this conviction, but observing the firm hold which it had taken on Alice's mind, he abstained from saying anything to weaken it, and gradually diverted her attention to other subjects connected with the solemn change which he saw to be imminent. The chamber of the dying is sacred ground, and we draw the veil of silence over what passed between him and Alice.

After a time Mr. Hamilton retired, and her father and mother and Marion resumed their place by her bedside. She was so

much exhausted that she could scarcely speak, and it was evident that the great change was not far distant. Marion supported her head upon her breast, while her father covered his face with his hands, and her mother lifted up her voice and wept.

“Do not cry, mother. We shall soon meet again, and Marion will be a daughter to you.”

These were her last words; she never spoke again, but they could see by her clasped hands and upturned eyes that she was engaged in prayer.

After watching for about an hour in silence, Mrs. Kynoch whispered to her husband, “Is she gone?”

“Not yet,” he said, “she will go with the tide.”

And Alice went with the tide, which bore her on to that vast ocean on which we must all soon embark.

CHAPTER XI.

THE assizes were to be held at Islayhead, about six weeks after Ninian Kynoch was committed to prison on the charge of murdering his uncle, and his friends felt that no time was to be lost in trying to unravel the mystery. Captain Leslie secured the services of the ablest member of the Scottish bar for the defence, and, acting on his advice, brought down a detective officer from Edinburgh to collect evidence, and to try to obtain some clue to the discovery of the real murderer. The advocate he employed was candid enough to inform him that, though the prisoner might be innocent, the circumstantial evidence against him was so strong that, unless some fresh facts bearing in his favour were elicited before the trial, he despaired of procuring his acquittal.

Macleavy, the detective officer, soon made himself a general favourite at Islayhead. He appeared there in the character of a small capitalist who was desirous of investing his money in some profitable speculation, and soon made himself familiar with all the inhabitants, none of whom, except Mr. McWyllie, knew who he really was. He was so ready to talk about his own affairs, and to give every information regarding himself, that, though a stranger, he disarmed suspicion, and in the course of a week was *au courant* with all the gossip of Islayhead. As the recent murder was in all men's mouths he professed to feel a deep interest in that event, and talked with all and sundry who could give him any information on the subject. He made the acquaintance of Stirling, and spent much of his time in his society; he encouraged him to speak of the murder and the motives which might have led to the crime, but, though the ex-schoolmaster drank his whisky, and showed no aversion to his society, he adhered faithfully to the statement which he had made before the magistrates, so that he was at length obliged to give up the search in despair, and to re-

turn to Edinburgh, more than half-convinced that Ninian was guilty.

Stirling, in virtue of his office, had free access to the jail and to all the prisoners. About a fortnight after the precognition, Ninian was surprised at receiving a visit from his old schoolmaster. It was towards evening, and the darkness of the cell, which was imperfectly lighted, prevented him from recognising him at first, but he sprang to his feet when Stirling addressed him :

“ Well, Mr. Ninian, how do you like your new quarters ? ”

Ninian returned no answer to this question.

“ What ! no answer ! Are you tired already of your box in the stone jug ? I have spent six months in it before now, and found my own thoughts such sorry companions that I should have been glad to see the face of an old friend. There is no accounting for taste, and as you seem to prefer solitude to my society I can easily go back the way I came.”

“ Have I reason to believe you to be my friend ? ”

“ Not much, certainly, if you think of your conduct to me ; that blow you struck

might have fractured a softer skull than mine; less than that would have sufficed to finish the miller."

"I daresay you know," said Ninian, significantly.

"You mean to insinuate, I suppose, that I gave him the finishing stroke, and that I found it convenient to get you hanged in my place; I have no wish to alter your opinion, if you like it, but Mr. Jingles, your advocate, who has saved many a man from tasting hemp, will find it difficult to bring the jury to the same way of thinking."

"I leave my cause in the hands of God."

"There is a good old French proverb, Mr. Ninian, '*Aide toi, et le ciel t'aidera*,' help yourself, and heaven will help you. If you do nothing for yourself you stand a strong chance of being hanged, and it is not likely that Providence will interfere with a special miracle, to prevent your neck from being broken, when you take your last leap."

"Leave me," said Ninian; "in a moment of passion I struck you; I was wrong, and I ask your forgiveness. I bear you no ill-will for the part you have taken against

me, but it is cruel to come here to insult me. Leave me in peace."

"Not quite yet, Mr. Ninian. I was smarting from the blow you gave me when I appeared in court, and, without meaning it, I spoke too strongly against you. I am ready now to make you the only amends in my power. Follow my advice, and in four and twenty hours you will be a free man."

The thought of liberty made Ninian's blood bound to his heart; if he had not supported himself against the wall he would have fallen.

Stirling marked the effect which his words had produced, and continued,—

"I once spent six months in solitary confinement, but I used to amuse myself by counting the hours, the minutes, and the seconds which must elapse before I regained my liberty. You will not find it so pleasant a task to count the hours, the minutes, and the seconds which must elapse before you are brought out upon a scaffold, before a staring, hooting mob, to be hanged by the neck till you are dead."

Ninian recoiled from the revolting picture.

"Think of the disgrace such a death will

bring upon your father and mother, if you care nothing for yourself. The dread of it has already killed your sister; what effect will the reality have upon your parents? They will never survive the disgrace; it will bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. All this you may avoid if you will only follow my advice."

"What am I to do?" said Ninian, whose voice trembled with excitement.

"With this file and this coil of rope," said Stirling, producing these articles from beneath his great-coat, "you can easily escape. The bars of the windows are old and rusty; a few touches of the file will enable you to break them. You are a sailor and know how to use the rope; I will take care that the outer gate is unlocked when you pass through it at night, and secure again before the morning. You know the Cave of Horror; take refuge there till a boat is sent from the French lugger which is lying in the bay. The captain is a friend of mine, and will give you a free passage to France."

"And how am I to know," said Ninian, suspiciously, "but that this is only a feint on your part to have me secured while trying

to escape, and thus to increase the evidence of my guilt? Have I not reason to suspect you?"

"You have; but I swear by all that is sacred that I mean honestly by you. The father that loves you, the mother who bore you, cannot be more anxious for your escape than I am. These hands have blood enough upon them already without bringing you to the scaffold. By saving your life, I shall be saving my own soul from a great crime, and, God knows, I have enough to answer for already. Decide at once, or it may be too late."

"Leave me for ten minutes," said Ninian. "At the end of that time you shall learn my decision."

"Most people in your case would decide sooner," said Stirling, as he closed the door.

When Ninian was left alone, it required no small effort to control the violent emotions which Stirling's proposal had excited. There is no instinct of our nature more powerful than the desire of life, and his soul recoiled with horror from the ignominious death which awaited him if he

were found guilty. The evidence against him was so overwhelming, that he could scarcely entertain the idea of acquittal, and then to be brought out upon the scaffold, amid the yells of an infuriated mob, to be subjected to the punishment of the lowest criminals, and to have his name branded as a murderer, there was something so revolting in the idea, that his first impulse was to accept Stirling's proposal, and to escape these horrors at any price. If he could only gain time, circumstances might occur to prove his innocence, whereas, if he made no effort to escape, his doom would be all but certain. But, then, was Stirling sincere in his proposal? Was his past conduct and bearing toward him such as to entitle him to his confidence? Had he not shown the strongest *animus* against him, and might not this be a plot to entrap him into an attempt at escape, that he might be caught in the very fact, and the suspicions against him thus be increased?

Or, even granting that Stirling was sincere, and that he contrived to effect his escape, and to reach some country where he would be beyond the reach of justice, what

would he really have gained? He would be pronounced an outlaw, and he could never return to his native country, unless, through some unforeseen events, the guilt were traced home to another—an eventuality rendered less probable by his escape, which would be almost equivalent to the admission of his guilt.

And then, throughout his past life he had striven to act from a high sense of duty, and would it be right to avoid the ordeal, which was none of his seeking, and had been imposed upon him by a higher power? Would not such conduct betray a miserable want of faith? Would it not be an act of moral cowardice to shrink from any suffering which he might be called upon to endure? Might not this trial have been sent upon him for some wise but mysterious purpose, and was it not his duty to submit, without attempting to struggle against his fate?

And then he thought of the great and good men of old, who, when the doors of their prison-house were thrown open, refused to escape, though they were exposed to the same danger as himself. Life was as dear to them as to him; a career of greater use-

fulness was before them, and yet they chose rather to await their fate in prison, leaving their lives in the keeping of Him without whose permission not one hair of their heads could fall to the ground, than to give way to the promptings of a selfish fear, and to escape without this permission. No, he would learn to imitate their faith, and to possess his soul in patience for whatever might be in store for him.

But it was a severe struggle—how severe none can tell save those who have passed through it—and it required more than his own strength to enable him to abide by his resolution. Never before had life, the mere consciousness of existence under any circumstances, appeared to him so valuable; and never had the voice of the tempter been so powerful in tempting him to prefer sight to faith, life to duty, as now; and it was only by throwing himself on his knees and wrestling in an agony of prayer, that he was enabled to stand up calm and self-possessed when Stirling entered.

“I thank you for your kindness,” said Ninian; “but I have thought the matter over, and I cannot avail myself of your offer.”

"You are tired of life, then?" said Stirling.

"Life was never so dear to me as at this moment, but I cannot accept it on such terms."

Stirling looked at him for a minute or two in silence, as if he were at a loss to understand his conduct, and then walked up to him and asked him to allow him to feel his pulse.

"Humph! slightly feverish, but steady enough on the whole. Well, Ninian, I must say you are a brave lad, and would have made a capital soldier. At first I was disposed to curse you for your folly, but I thought better of it, and I sincerely pity you. I have behaved to you like a scoundrel, and I cannot draw back altogether from what I have said, but I swear I will say as little against you as I can when I give my evidence. If you had been a chicken-hearted milksop, I could have seen you consigned to the gallows without regret, but it seems a pity that such a brave lad as you should be hanged for relieving the world of a miserly old hulks like the miller."

"You believe me, then, to be his mur-

derer?" said Ninian, eyeing him steadily.

Stirling avoided a direct answer.

"I am neither judge nor juryman," he said, "and my belief can be of little use to you one way or the other; I can be of no more service to you, and I am only sorry that such a likely lad as you should stand such a bad chance of being hanged."

With these words Stirling left him, and Ninian saw nothing more of him till the day of the trial. Mr. Hamilton was the only one of his friends whom Ninian saw regularly; in virtue of his office he had free access to him daily, and his society and prayers did much to sustain him, and to prevent him from regretting the choice he had made. Though Marion was not admitted to the prison, she contrived, through Mr. Hamilton, to let Ninian know how deeply interested she was in his fate, and how confident she was that something would yet occur to prove him innocent. This confidence was so strongly expressed in the letters which she wrote, that Ninian's faith was strengthened by them, though as yet he could not perceive any dawn of hope in the outward horizon. He could only fall back upon the conscious-

ness of his own innocence, and lean upon Him who has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

In truth Ninian needed all the strength which is derived from such promises, for human aid seemed to be of little avail. Captain Leslie travelled all the way to Edinburgh, and brought down with him to Islayhead the eloquent lawyer whom he had employed in Ninian's defence. He had a private interview with Ninian, and learned from his own lips all that he had stated before the magistrates. He was convinced of his innocence, but he frankly told him that he almost despaired of carrying the same conviction to the minds of any jury, when he had to struggle against the force of such adverse evidence. It was something for Ninian to know that the lawyer who defended him believed him to be innocent, and could employ his eloquence in his behalf without doing violence to his own conscience.

Meanwhile Marion had not forgotten Alice's dying injunctions. She scarcely knew what weight ought to be attached to her words—whether she ought to treat

them as a kind of inspiration, or to look upon them as the meaningless vagary of a mind weakened by disease. In either case she had pledged her word to the dying girl, and she felt that a promise thus given ought to be regarded as sacred. She, therefore, embraced the first opportunity of paying a visit to Stirling's cottage, without mentioning her purpose to her father and her uncle, who might not have viewed the matter in the same light as herself, and objected to her having any intercourse with a woman of such doubtful character as Madame Jacqueline.

Marion's heart almost failed her when she knocked at the door of Stirling's cottage; she was doubtful of the reception she might meet with, and scarcely knew how she could justify her visit. The thought of Ninian revived her courage, and as no one appeared, she knocked again, and heard a feeble voice exclaim, "Entrez donc." Obeying the invitation, Marion entered, and found herself in the place which served as kitchen and bedroom. As no one was visible, she was about to try the other room, when the same voice said, "What will you be pleased to want?"

Marion was not prepared to answer this question, but encouraged by the polite manner in which it was put, she took a chair and sat down by the side of the box-bed in which Madame Jacqueline lay. She had her head enveloped in a strange *coiffure* of linen rags, which did not effectually conceal the marks of recent wounds on her flushed and feverish face. Marion spoke a few kind words to her in her native tongue; she half raised herself, and after gazing earnestly in her face, clasped her hands, and exclaimed:

“Mon Dieu! it is my sister Lisette come to life again.”

Marion tried to calm her by assuring her that she was not her sister Lisette, but a lady from the Castle, who had come to visit her, and was sorry to find her so very ill.

“Ah! you are Lady Nairn. I have heard speak of you, milady. You had a *brigand* of a husband, like my own. I can pity you. Poor broken heart, how I pity you! These men, these cursed men, how they make us to suffer. Would that mine were where yours is, *le vieux scélérat*. But let me look at you. Yes, it is the eyes,

the hair, the mouth, the very face of poor Lisette, my little sister, who died more than twenty years ago. Would to God that I had died with her ; it would have saved me much sin and sorrow. Better far to have been in my grave than to live with a man who treats me worse than a dog, and would be glad if I were to die to-morrow."

Marion soothed her with kind words, and wetting her handkerchief, applied it to her burning brow ; she arranged her pillows, and inquired into the cause of her illness. Madame Jacqueline frankly told her that it had been caused by the brutality of her husband, who, in a fit of drunkenness, had attacked her and used her so ill that she was left insensible on the floor. On regaining her consciousness, she had managed to crawl to bed, where she had remained for two days without seeing any one, as her husband had taken possession of the former school-room, where he slept, and cooked his own meals. "I should have died," she said, "if it had not been for this." She produced a bottle of brandy from beneath her pillow, and applied it to her lips.

"Ah! you may shake your head, but

this is my best, my only friend. I have no God, no heaven, no home, and a husband who is worse than a devil. How could I have lived so long if it had not been for this, my dearest friend?"

She clasped the bottle to her heart, as if it had been a living thing which she loved. Marion took it gently from her hands, and put it aside. She removed the rags from her head, and washed the livid wounds with which it was disfigured. She aided her to rise, and showed towards her those little kindnesses to which she had been so long unused. The heart of the miserable woman, which had still something womanly in it, was touched; she overflowed with thanks, and passionately kissed Marion's hands, when she could reach them. Her ear was charmed with the sound of her native tongue, of which she had heard nothing for years, save the guttural imprecations in which Stirling occasionally indulged, by way of novelty, when he had exhausted his English vocabulary of swearing. She asked Marion, as a favour, to be allowed to touch her hair, and to kiss her cheek, and when Marion consented, she wept and said, "It is my poor Lisette all over."

It may be that Marion's resemblance to Lisette touched her heart as much as her kindness. There is a secret vein of sentimentality in the composition of the lowest class of French women ; it is their religion, *faute de mieux*. The resemblance to Lisette was the odic force, real or pretended, which attracted Madame Jacqueline to Marion, and called forth all the capacity of loving which was still left in her desolate heart.

Marion was so touched with compassion for this miserable woman, that she forgot the object of her visit, and thought only of the means of rendering her more comfortable. She refused to see a doctor, or to admit any one of her own sex to wait upon her ; she abused her husband, and swore that she would be avenged upon him. " The brigand ! he little knows how much he is in my power, but he may know some day. *Il rit bien qui rit le dernier.*"

When Marion had done everything in her power for her present comfort, she proposed to take her leave. Madame Jacqueline besought her in the most urgent terms to have mercy on a *pauvre malheureuse*, and to visit her the following day, at an hour which she mentioned, when she was sure

that her husband would not be at home.

“You can sympathize with me, milady,” she said “for you also have suffered.”

Marion was pleased with her visit—she had done something to alleviate the sufferings of this miserable woman, who, degraded though she was, was not altogether unwomanly, or without some remains of what she once had been. It was evident that her husband’s brutality had embittered her feelings against him; and her dark threats of revenge confirmed Marion’s belief that he had been guilty of the murder, and that she was cognizant of his guilt. It remained to be seen whether, by appealing to her conscience, or her sense of justice, she could persuade her to save Ninian from the scaffold, and to consign her own husband to the fate which was now impending over him.

She repeated her visit next day, and found Madame Jacqueline up, and ready to receive her. An attempt had been made to give a certain air of tidiness to the room, and Madame herself, though her face was still partially disfigured, was decidedly improved in personal appearance. She had

also been more sparing in her libations, though she had not been able to abstain altogether from what was now the great solace of her existence. She received Marion with that easy politeness which is so natural to Frenchwomen of all classes, and expressed to her in her native tongue the pleasure which she felt at seeing her. It was so pleasant to meet a civilized person in this barbarous country, and to hear again the language of her youth, after the rough, guttural dialect of the natives, to which her ear had never been reconciled.

After some personal inquiries, Marion directed the conversation to the recent murder. It was natural that she should allude to it, as it was in all men's mouths, but she observed that the subject produced an immediate change in Madame Jacqueline's manner. She lost her easy, natural air, became reserved and cautious in her speech, and expressed a desire that they should talk of some other subject, as the thought of such a fearful crime was enough to give her the vapours. Marion expressed her conviction that Ninian was innocent; but when she went a step further, and

dwelt upon the necessity of trying to vindicate his innocence, Madame Jacqueline impatiently exclaimed—

“Mon Dieu! milady—that is the affair of the lawyers and the judges. What do we know about his innocence or guilt; or, supposing that he is innocent, how can we prove it? That regards the judge and the jury, and does not concern a lady like you. If he suffers unjustly, have not many others done so?—myself, *par exemple*. Many a poor devil has suffered for the sins of others; and if he has to do so, it is his affair, not ours. *Parlons d'autre chose*.”

Marion saw that it was useless to allude any further at present to the subject which was uppermost in her thoughts. Madame Jacqueline's manner, however, showed that the subject was disagreeable to her. Could this be the result of the part which her husband had had in procuring Ninian's arrest, or was it owing to her knowledge of his being in some way connected with the crime? It was scarcely possible that Stirling should have been guilty of such a crime without her cognizance; but the difficulty was how to persuade her to de-

nounce him to justice. By denouncing him she might be denouncing herself as an accomplice, and might thus be deterred by self-interest from avowing the truth. It could not be affection for her husband that led her to try to screen him from justice—but, doubtless, she had shared in the booty, and had thus a powerful motive for endeavouring to conceal his guilt.

Marion visited her again and again, without any better success. She was evidently on her guard, and all Marion's indirect appeals to her sense of justice produced no effect. The Frenchwoman was too much engrossed with her own sufferings to care much for the fate of others, and expressed little interest in the subject which lay so near to Marion's heart.

Marion then essayed a different course. She explained to Madame Jacqueline that her father, who was very wealthy, was indebted to Ninian for his life, and that he would give a large part of his fortune to anyone who was instrumental in proving him to be innocent. His object was not so much to discover the real criminal as to save one who had every claim upon his

gratitude, and there was no sacrifice he would not willingly make to attain this end.

"Then, milady," said Madame Jacqueline, "the matter appears to me very simple. Stirling is always open to reason when it concerns his own interests. He is the principal evidence against the young man, and if he were out of the way, he could not be found guilty. Let your father persuade Stirling that he requires a change of air, and provide him with the means of living in France, and I will undertake that he will not appear in court."

"My father is a gentleman," said Marion, proudly, "who could never stoop to such meanness, even to save the life of a friend. You have mistaken his character."

"It is possible, milady," said Madame Jacqueline, with great nonchalance. "I have lived long among you other English, and the more I live among you the less I understand you. The matter appeared to me very simple, but I defer to your better judgment."

Thus Marion was baffled in all her attempts, and, meanwhile, it was within a

week of Ninian's trial. Could nothing more be done? Was there no means by which she could reach the heart of the Frenchwoman, and excite an interest there in behalf of Ninian? She had hitherto spoken of herself as one who had no other interest in the accused than that which naturally arose from the obligation which her father owed to him; what if she were to confess the whole truth, and to admit that her own happiness was indissolubly bound up in Ninian's fate? Such a confession would only involve some sacrifice of personal feeling, and might produce more effect upon Madame Jacqueline than all her previous attempts. No Frenchwoman passes through life without experiencing the great passion, or lives so long as to lose all sympathy with those who are under its spell; she would make a last appeal—if she failed she would at least have the consolation of knowing that she had left no means untried to save Ninian's life.

Marion never visited Madame Jacqueline without hearing of her resemblance to Lisette, her favourite sister. On the occasion of her last visit, she expressed an inte-

rest in Lisette, and inquired into her history. Lisette, by Madame Jacqueline's showing, had been the victim of a romantic attachment, which brought her to an early grave; and as she recounted the different incidents of her life, she shed many tears at her unfortunate fate. The story was simple and touching, and there was so much of real feeling mingled with Madame Jacqueline's narrative, that Marion more than once was melted to tears. Madame Jacqueline kissed her hand, and expressed a hope that she would be happier in life than poor Lisette.

Marion felt that now was the time to open up her heart to Madame Jacqueline, so long as she was in this melting mood, and to endeavour to engage her sympathy in her behalf. The tears which she had shed for Lisette might be the augury of her own success, and the story of Ninian's attachment had in itself so many elements of romance that, told in all its simplicity, it could scarcely fail to produce some effect upon Madame Jacqueline.

"You have told me the story of poor Lisette," she said, "and we have both wept

over her untimely fate. Would you not like to hear the story of my life? You know I have not always been a grand lady—I was brought up as a fisherman's daughter."

Madame would be charmed to hear a history so romantic from the lips of her who was the heroine of it; and Marion, without further preface, told her of her birth and helpless condition, of the kindness of the fisherman's family, of the intimacy between her and Ninian till she was recognized by her uncle, of the romantic attachment he had cherished towards her during her absence, and of the efforts he had made to render himself worthy of her love. She admitted that she herself was blind to the real character of his feelings toward her, and, in an evil moment, bestowed her affections upon one who proved himself unworthy of her love. He had dissipated her fortune and ruined her uncle, under whose roof she had again sought shelter after her husband's death. She told her of the circumstances under which her intimacy with Ninian had been renewed, and how she became acquainted with the story of his life, and the

noble ambition with which his love for her had inspired him. It was the same passion which had influenced his every thought and aspiration, that had induced him to risk his honour and his reputation in the attempt to save her uncle from the immediate effects of his embarrassments—it was the same passion which had brought upon him the foul suspicion of murder, and might yet bring him to the gallows, if the guilt were not traced home to the real criminal before the trial. Madame Jacqueline must appreciate the nobleness of such a character; her heart must be touched with a story of such devoted, unselfish love; could she suggest nothing to effect his deliverance?

“Milady, you should be his advocate. If you pleaded his cause as well before the judge as you have done before me, there are not twelve men in the kingdom who would not acquit him.”

“Then you feel that he is innocent? Does not such a man deserve to live, and would it not be a crime to suffer him to die, if we can prevent it?”

“Do you love him very much?” said Madame Jacqueline, looking Marion directly in the face.

"I do," said Marion, blushing at the directness of the question ; "I love him so much that, if he asked me to marry him at this moment, when his fate is still so uncertain, I would become his wife, if such a thing could be done. I love him so much that I could gladly accompany him to the scaffold, and share his fate, if he is pronounced guilty. I might never have avowed my love, if this great trial had not been brought upon him ; but now it would be cowardice to conceal it. Oh ! Ninian, what would I not do to save you ? If you die, it is I who am your murderer."

And Marion wept in the bitterness of her heart. In the intensity of her grief, she had forgotten the cause she was pleading, and pled it all the better by so doing.

Madame Jacqueline was more touched by Marion's grief than by the imminency of Ninian's danger. Marion was the only human being who had spoken words of kindness to her for many years, who had associated with her, and expressed sympathy with her desolate, miserable condition. If her sister Lisette, to whom she bore such a striking resemblance, had been brought back to life, she could not have acted the part of

a sister more than Marion had done, and she had shown all this sympathy and kindness while her own heart was crushed beneath the weight of her own great sorrow. The romantic element in Marion's story was not without its influence, and she felt a strong inclination to act the part of the good fairy, and to come to the rescue of the incarcerated lover. But how was this to be done? It would be cruel to give rise to hopes which might be disappointed, and it would be rash to allude to the great secret, which, as yet, was known only to herself and to one other human being.

She took Marion's hand respectfully in hers and kissed it. "Milady, my heart bleeds for you. You have been kind to me, and Jacqueline Delauney is one who never forgets a kindness or an injury. The treatment of others, and my own folly, have brought me to be what I am, what you see me to be; but your kindness has brought back my better self, and reminded me that I am a woman. My countrywomen are said to be quick-witted; I will think over what you have said, and I will write to you, if I can suggest anything."

"The trial comes on in a week," said Marion, earnestly.

"Much may be done in less time," said Madame Jacqueline, significantly; "but you must not come back here till you hear from me."

Marion took her leave, cheered, in some measure, by these words. If Ninian's life was to be saved, it could only be done by Madame Jacqueline.

CHAPTER XII.

THE holding of the assizes always creates a sensation in a quiet provincial town in Scotland, but there was an unusual concourse of strangers around the court-house on the morning of the day when Ninian Kynoch was to be tried for the murder of his uncle. His distinguished career as a scholar had made him an object of pride among his townsmen, who felt that they had some credit in the matter, and the serious charge which had been brought against him excited their curiosity, and led them to flock to the court-house, which was crowded before the trial began.

The judges, in scarlet robes and powdered wigs, marched in solemn procession, accompanied by a guard of honour, from their hotel to the court-house, and took their places on the bench with all the gravity becoming their office. The young advocates, who had travelled so far north in the

hope of displaying their unfledged eloquence in behalf of some undefended prisoner, seated themselves within the bar, and arranged their papers, as if they felt that a heavy day's labour was before them. The local solicitors looked at them with an admiring air, and tacitly admitted their own inferiority to the young lions of the profession who had come amongst them.

There was some distance between the jail and the court-house, and when Ninian stepped from the van, he found a small crowd of the townsmen, who had been unable to secure an entrance, standing around the door, and amusing themselves by listening to the ready wit and droll humour of "daft Jamie," the town's fool, who gained a livelihood by singing doggerel verses of his own composition in the streets. In accordance with a time-honoured custom, the bells had been set a-ringing, and as Ninian stepped from the van between two officers, one of the crowd said to "daft Jamie," "Come now, you who know everything, can you tell us what the bells are saying?"

Jamie looked Ninian full in the face and

answered, without a moment's hesitation :—

“ They that are guiltless need not fear,
Although Lord Justice be come here.”

The audience applauded the truism thus rhythmically expressed, and Ninian accepted it as a good omen.

His appearance at the bar created a strong impression in his favour. He was somewhat pale, but cool and collected, neither inviting nor shrinking from the scrutiny of the spectators. The kindness of his friends had enabled him to appear in the dress of a gentleman, and the jury, who had been summoned from a distant part of the country, and had not seen him before, expressed to one another their surprise that a man of his appearance should be suspected of such a crime. The laird of Inverchewan and his brother were seated near the judges, and bowed to Ninian when he recognized them. Ninian returned their salutation, and looked round the court, as if in search of some face which he expected to be there; but though he saw his father and Mr. Hamilton, and many others who smiled upon him, the face that was dearer to him than every other was not there.

Mr. Hamilton opened the court with prayer, and the trial began. Ninian pleaded Not Guilty. The advocate-depute, or prosecutor for the crown, submitted to the jury a *résumé* of the evidence which had been given at the precognition, and had led to the arrest of the prisoner at the bar. He then proceeded to call witnesses for the prosecution, and Ailie, the housekeeper, Mr. McWyllie, and Mr. Hamilton were examined in succession. Their evidence referred merely to the appearance of the body when first discovered, and was in no respect different from that which they had given at the precognition. Ailie gave an account of the prisoner's visit to his uncle, and of his return to the house after parting with him, and created some amusement among the young lawyers by the quaint provincial *patois* in which she gave her evidence.

Stirling next appeared in the witness-box. It was known that he was the principal witness against the accused, and the occasional coughing, sneezing, and other noises which had occasionally elicited indignant remonstrances from the judges, and ineffectual cries of "Silence!" from the

officers of the court, ceased when he began to give his evidence. It was, in substance, the same as before, but it was not marked by the same *animus* against the prisoner. On the contrary, without altering the facts, he showed a desire to explain them in Ninian's favour as far as he could, and candidly admitted that he was labouring under resentment against the prisoner when he gave his evidence before the magistrates.

After he had finished, the counsel for Ninian began his cross-examination, which referred at first to Stirling's antecedents. The lawyer had an eye which seemed to pierce into the hearts of those on whom it was fixed, and many a brave man had quailed beneath it; but Stirling had encountered worse enemies than a lawyer's eye, and met his gaze without shrinking.

He admitted, with perfect frankness, that he had been an actor, a soldier, a tinker, and a schoolmaster, before he turned sheriff's officer. He did not deny that if he were stripped the marks of the lash would be found upon his person; but he affirmed that he had incurred this disgraceful punish-

ment by breaking out of barracks, which, however reprehensible as a military offence, did not in any way affect his moral character, or impugn his veracity as a witness.

“Did you not rob the late Lord Nairn of a large sum of money, and try to throw the blame on the accused?”

“I decline answering that question.”

The counsel pressed him for an answer; but the court decided that the witness was not called upon to answer any question which might criminate himself.

“You stated before the magistrates that the prisoner robbed Lord Nairn; do you still adhere to that statement?”

“I do not. I believe that he is innocent of that charge?”

“Why did you bring such an accusation against him?”

“I did so under the influence of passion. He had struck me, and I had no opportunity of resenting the affront.”

“You stated in your original evidence that when the prisoner struck you, on the evening before the murder, he intended to rob you. What reason have you for believing that he intended to do so?”

"None whatever. I regret very much that I ever said so. It was in consequence of the provocation I had given him that he struck me. I was smarting under that affront when I said that he intended to rob me."

"Now, sir, on your oath, was it not this same feeling of resentment which induced you—after making two charges against the prisoner, which you yourself now admit to be false—to say that you saw him leap from the window of his uncle's room on the night of the murder?"

"It was not."

"You swear that you saw him leap from the window?"

"I do."

"What were you doing there at that late hour?"

"I was returning home from Inverchewan Castle."

Other questions were put to the witness, but nothing was elicited to shake his testimony that he had seen the prisoner escape from the house on the night of the murder. The jury were disposed at first to disbelieve his evidence when he admitted that he had

made false charges against the prisoner in a moment of irritation, but when he candidly and sincerely expressed his regret at having done so, and still adhered to the main facts, their opinion was changed, and the feeling towards him, notwithstanding his more than questionable antecedents, became more favourable.

The bill which had been found on Ninian's person, after his apprehension, was then produced, and Stirling swore that he had seen it in Mackay's possession two days before the murder. The statement which Ninian had volunteered before the magistrates was about to be read, when his counsel interfered and objected to such a document being received as evidence. A discussion arose between him and the advocate-depute as to its admissibility, which was stopped by Ninian declaring, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his counsel, that he still adhered to every word contained in that statement. The judge then authorized his deposition to be read, and, as might have been expected, it produced an unfavourable impression on the jury, who looked upon it as almost equivalent to a confession of guilt. Ninian ob-

served the effect which it had produced, and for which he had been, in some measure, prepared. It may appear strange, but he was more sustained at that moment, when death was staring at him from the jurymen's eyes, by the remembrance of the doggerel verses which he had heard on entering the court, than by all the maxims of philosophy or the consolations of religion.

His counsel then addressed the jury in his defence, and spoke for about two hours. He traced the early career of the prisoner at the bar, and spoke of his distinguished success as a scholar. It sometimes happened that the highest intellectual attainments were found united with the lowest and most grovelling principles, but in this case it would be shown by the evidence of the professors under whom he had studied, and the clergyman who had known him from boyhood, that no stain or suspicion of guilt had ever affected his character. Was it credible that one so distinguished as a scholar, so irreproachable as a man, should have leaped at once into such an abyss of guilt? All experience proved that crime was progressive, but here

it was attempted to be shown that the prisoner at the bar had become, in one day, a murderer and a robber. The murderer of whom? Of an old man who was connected with him by the ties of blood, and whose helpless condition gave him every claim upon his protection! What motive could he have for the commission of such a crime? It was known that the murdered man had made a will in which he left all his property to the prisoner at the bar. That will had disappeared with all his other papers. Was it reasonable to suppose that a man of intelligence like the prisoner, would have carried off a will which he could never produce at any after period, and without which he could never obtain possession of his uncle's property? The sum which had been carried off was insignificant when compared with that property, and was it probable that the prisoner should have sacrificed all his future advantages for the immediate possession of that sum of which he had no urgent need? And who was the principal evidence against the prisoner? A wandering vagabond who had the mark of the lash on his body, and, it might be, deserved to have the brand

of Cain on his brow ! They could judge of the value of his evidence by their knowledge of his previous character, and by his own admission that, from feelings of revenge, he had brought unwarrantable charges against the accused. He hoped to be able to convince them that this witness, instead of being left at large and encouraged to swear away the life of an innocent man, should this day be occupying the place of the prisoner at the bar, as the murderer of the miller of Loanhead.

Admit the prisoner's own statement, and every difficulty connected with the case disappeared. Actuated by a lofty spirit of chivalry, he had interceded with his uncle in behalf of a family who were in his power, and whom he had resolved to destroy. His appeal to him at his own house had been in vain, and it might have been well, perhaps, if he had stopped short at this his first attempt, but anxious to obtain some respite for this oppressed family, he returned to write a letter to his uncle, and made his way into his room for that purpose. There the idea occurred to him, that if he could obtain possession of the bill which placed this

family in his uncle's power, they would be rescued from immediate ruin. If he had had time to reflect he would have resisted this temptation, but, in an evil hour, he yielded to it, and this weakness had placed him where he now was. Doubtless he thought that, as all his uncle's property would be one day his, there would be no great harm in retaining this bill in his possession for a time, and restoring it when the danger was past. Thus, with no felonious intention, he took possession of the bill which was found upon his person. At this moment he heard a noise at the door of the room, and, on applying his eye to the keyhole, saw another eye opposite to his, watching his movements. In the panic of the moment, he leaped from the window, and made his escape.

To whom did that mysterious eye belong? Was it the eye of the uncle, or of the uncle's murderer? Was it likely that the uncle, if he had suddenly returned, would have stood quietly by when he saw his nephew ransacking the coffer in which he kept his gold? As his money was dearer to him than life, would he not at once have burst

into the room and caught him in the very act? Was it not more reasonable to suppose that it was the eye of the murderer, who had broken into the house, and stopped short at the door, when he found that some one had anticipated him? Admit that it was the eye of the murderer, and they could easily divine the rest. The murderer, on seeing the coast clear, had entered the room and begun to take possession of the contents of the coffer. At this moment the miller returned, and caught him in the very act. A struggle had ensued, and, in that struggle, the miller had come by his death. The murderer had then carried off the contents of the coffer, and contrived to remain, as yet, undetected.

Who was that murderer? Was it the man who had appeared in court this day as the principal witness against the accused? Was his object to screen himself by accusing another? He swore that he saw the accused leap from the window; no eye could have seen him but that eye which watched his movements in the room—the eye of the murderer. He alone was so familiar with the miller's house as to have been able to

effect an entrance ; he, by his own confession, was lurking about the premises on that night, and was it not the most natural conclusion, that he ought to have been standing this day at the bar, to answer for the crime which he was striving to impute to another ?

It was inconceivable that the accused, if he had been the murderer, should have written a letter, on the very night of the murder, which must have necessarily led to his own detection. What were the facts of the case ? On his return home, he sat down, and wrote a letter to the gentleman whom his uncle had been prosecuting, and, in that letter, he said that he need be under no apprehension, as the bill on which his uncle had taken action was now in his possession. Was such a fact reconcileable with the theory that he had murdered his uncle, or that he knew that his uncle was murdered at all ? Could he have supposed that the gentleman who received that letter would conceal it, when he heard of the murder, and thus become an accomplice ?

It was impossible to believe it ; whereas, on the other hand, admit his own statement

to be true, and every difficulty disappeared. He knew nothing of the murder of his uncle till he was apprehended on suspicion ; if he had known that his uncle was murdered at all, he must have felt that that letter would lead to his apprehension. Did he make any attempt to escape? Why, on the very morning of his apprehension, he had saved the life of a gentleman who was now in court, and who was so convinced of his innocence, that he had used every effort to procure his acquittal. On a former occasion he had saved the life of the very man whom he was now accused of murdering. Was it likely that he would have taken away that life without a motive, or, if he had done so, that he would have written a letter which must have led to his detection, or exposed his own life in saving that of a stranger? Did he look like a murderer?—like one who would take the life of a defenceless old man, and that old man his own uncle?

The accused was an only son, the pride of his father, the joy of his mother. This unfounded charge had already deprived them of their only daughter. Would the

jury bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, by branding their honest name with infamy, in consigning their son to the scaffold? If they could not hold up their faces before God and man, and pronounce him to be innocent, at least save themselves from the possibility of committing a legal murder, by declaring the charge not proven, and He, to whom the blood of the murdered man was crying aloud for vengeance, would soon bring to light the real perpetrator of the crime.

This is but a feeble outline of the address, which produced a profound sensation upon the jury and the audience. They had not yet recovered from its effect when an officer of the court hurried up to Captain Leslie, and whispered something in his ear.

He immediately left the court, accompanied by his brother, and returned in a few minutes with Marion, who had been left at home. Her face was flushed with excitement, and when she passed Ninian she gave him such a look as an angel might give to a soul rescued from impending evil by his power.

Captain Leslie whispered rapidly a few words to Ninian's counsel, and placed on the table before him a number of papers, and a canvas bag, which seemed to be empty.

On seeing the bag, Stirling turned pale, rose, and was about to leave the court, when Ninian's counsel said,—

“My lords, on my own responsibility I give that man into custody as the murderer of Adam Mackay.”

The officers of the court seized Stirling, and brought him back to his former place. He looked deadly pale, but he offered no resistance.

The counsel again addressed the court :—

“My lords, I expressed my conviction that the real murderer would soon be brought to light, but I scarcely expected that I should obtain the proofs of his guilt before leaving this court. I may have incurred some blame this day by denouncing the witness Stirling as the murderer. I shall now justify my words by proving him to be so. With your permission I shall place Lady Nairn in the witness-box, as she has important evidence to give.”

It took a little time before Marion was sufficiently composed to give her evidence. She was not examined as a witness, but was permitted by the court to read a statement of all that she knew about the crime. Ninian covered his face with his hands and leaned his head on the railing before him, but his ear drank in every word which Marion read. There was a simple earnestness in her words which carried conviction to every mind.

“The prisoner is innocent. I never believed him to be guilty. We were brought up together, and he has always been all that is good, and kind, and generous. He has always been my protector; and it was his desire to befriend me which has placed him at this bar. The murdered man hated me and mine—I know not why—and wished to ruin us. Unfortunately we were in his power, and he seemed disposed to use every means to expose us to disgrace. On the night of the murder the accused saw me, and promised that he would prevail upon his uncle to give us a little respite, till we had time to leave the country. At a late hour on the

same night we received a letter from him; he wrote that we were safe, as the bill was now in his possession. Next morning he saved my father's life, and was himself apprehended on the charge of murder.

"He had a sister called Alice: she was always weakly, and this charge killed her. I was with her when she died, and before her death she told me much about her brother that I did not know before, and said that I must save his life. She said that God had put it into her heart to believe that Stirling was the murderer, and that no one could trace the murder home to him but me; I must make the acquaintance of his wife, and, through her, obtain the evidence of his guilt.

"Though diffident of myself, and doubtful of success, I was ready to do anything for one who had done so much for me, and whom I knew to be innocent. I made the acquaintance of Madame Stirling: she was very ill—a foreigner, and friendless. I felt so sorry for her, that, at first, I only thought of her misery. I nursed her, and in time we became friends.

"I often spoke of the murder, but she

tried to avoid the subject—I returned to it again and again, but without success. Her husband had used her very ill, but she was faithful to him, and would confess nothing against him. As a last resource I told her the story of my life, and the many claims which the accused has upon my gratitude. I know the character of her countrywomen, and I thought that this appeal might have some effect. I was not mistaken. She told me nothing at the moment, but she held out hopes that I might hear from her, and that something might yet occur to save the accused.

“I had this interview with her a week ago, and she forbade me to return till I heard from her. I waited anxiously from day to day, as the trial was fast hastening on, but she gave no sign, and I had almost ceased to hope. At length this, the morning of the trial, came. My father and my uncle intended to be present, and I was left alone at the Castle. About two hours after they had left, I received a letter, which was delivered by one of the fishermen of the village. He had received it from Madame Stirling on the previous evening, but had

been ordered not to deliver it till this morning. I opened it with a trembling hand, and hurriedly glanced over its contents. It was written in French, and I translate it literally:—

“ ‘MILADY,—At length I yield. I can hold out no longer. So long as my husband was faithful to me, there was a certain fidelity which I owed to him, and though I wept tears of blood for the fate of the companion of your youth, I could not save him. I should have been false to my name, for the Delauneys have never been traitors.

“ ‘My husband, as you know, treated me worse than a dog; you saw on my body the marks of his barbarity. Ah! the brigand little knew that I had surprised his secret, and that I had only to hold up my finger to bring him to the scaffold. Yes, I knew that he was a murderer, but I could not forget that he was my husband—a cruel, brutal, merciless husband, if you choose—but still my husband.

“ ‘My heart bled for you, milady, but I would not have denounced my husband, if he had been faithful to me. It is well that I have discovered his secret in time, it may

not be too late to save an innocent life. I knew my husband to be a murderer, and I concealed his guilt, but when I discovered, from a letter which I took from his pocket while he was asleep, that he intended to desert me—*me* who gave up for him all that is dearest to a woman's heart, and to leave the country with the wife of another man, I felt that my oath of fidelity was no longer binding, and that such a man was unworthy to live.

“ ‘ At the same time, with all that candour which has characterized my intercourse with you, milady, I must tell you that I met, a few days ago, Pierre Guimbeau, the captain of the French lugger which has been lying in your bay for some weeks. Pierre is of the same village as myself, and our families are connected. He spoke to me of the old place, and of old times, of the village green, where we used to dance on Sundays, of the village church-yard, where poor Lisette and my mother lie buried. *Que voulez vous*, milady? I became a little child, and nothing would satisfy me but I must go back to Normandy, and shed a few tears on my mother's grave. The discovery of my

husband's treachery decided me; he intended to leave me in this barbarous country—well, he shall be left himself, with M. Ketch to console him. The brigand! he deserves no consideration at my hands.

“ ‘When you receive this letter, I shall be sailing with Pierre Guimbeau to the land of my birth. France is a beautiful country; but I could not return to my native village without a sou, so I have taken all the gold which my husband took from others. He will not have any further use for it, and it must be some consolation for him to think that his wife has not been altogether unprovided for. Such a thought must console him in his last hours, and I hope he will be truly penitent for all the sins he has committed, as well as for the one he intended to commit.

“ ‘And now, milady, I must tell you how I came to know that my husband is a murderer, and how you can prove it to others. You know that Lord Nairn was robbed of a large sum of money; it was my husband who took it, and tried to throw suspicion on Ninian Kynoch. How do I know that he took it? Because I watched him after his

return, on the night of the robbery, and saw him bury the gold in a hole beneath the hearth-stone, in the school-room. He thought that I was asleep; if he had suspected that I was awake, he would have killed me. I kept his secret; he was a bad man, but he was my husband. I could not find it in my heart to give him up to justice, and some day the gold might be useful. It has proved to be so.

“ ‘ Well, but as to the miller’s murder—that is what you wish most to know about. Well, on that night Stirling came home about midnight. He was not drunk, but he had the look of a man who had done murder. His clothes were torn, his hands and his face were covered with scratches, and there was a mad, devilish look in his eyes. He confessed nothing, but I thought to myself: Ah, I shall hear more of this—there is blood on his hands. He drank more than usual, but drink had no effect upon him. I observed that he had a bundle beneath his cloak, but I said nothing. I knew that he would take my life if he found it his interest to do so. He has always been a man of blood. My poor Eugene!

“ ‘ At length he went to bed, but not to sleep. I knew that he was watching me, and after a time I pretended to drop off. He rose stealthily, lighted a candle, and after applying it close to my eyes, he seemed to be satisfied that I was asleep. He took the bundle which he had concealed beneath his cloak, and went to the school-room. I removed the piece of rag which concealed the hole I had made in the wall, and watched his proceedings. I saw him open the bundle, which contained a number of papers, and a considerable sum in gold. When he had counted the money, he removed the hearth-stone, and placed it and the papers in the hole where he had hidden the gold which he stole from Lord Nairn. He then covered up the hole, and replaced the stone. I was in bed before he returned, and he little suspected that I had discovered his secret, and that his life was in my power.

“ ‘ Next morning I heard of the miller’s death, and I knew that my husband was the murderer. What could I do? I could not find it in my heart to denounce one whom I had sworn to honour and obey; but when

I found that he was trying to lay the guilt upon one who was innocent, I ventured to expostulate with him. I do not know whether he suspected that I knew anything, but he treated me with brutal violence, and swore that he would murder me if I ever alluded to the subject again. I think I should have died if you, milady, had not come, like an angel of mercy, and ministered to my wants. You saved my life, and when I came to know how deeply you were interested in the fate of the accused, I hesitated what to do.

“ ‘The infidelity of my husband decided me. The man who intended to desert me, a friendless stranger in a foreign land, deserved no consideration. So I have taken the gold, which can be of no use to him, and written this letter, which I hope will be very useful to you. When you receive it, lose no time in visiting the school-room, and securing the papers in the presence of witnesses. They will be sufficient to verify what I have written, and to save the life of an innocent man. Before you have received this, I shall be beyond the reach of your thanks and my husband’s vengeance.

“ ‘Accept, milady, the assurance of my highest consideration and esteem.

“ ‘JACQUELINE STIRLING,

“ ‘*née* DELAUNEY.’

“ On receiving this letter I did not hesitate for a moment, but hurried to the village, where I secured the services of two officers of justice, who accompanied me to the school-house. The stone was removed by them in my presence, and beneath it were found the papers, which are now in the hands of the counsel for the accused, and which, it can easily be proved, belonged to the murdered man. We obtained a post-chaise at the village, and drove to the court-house. The officers of justice are present, and ready to give their evidence.”

This statement was listened to with breathless silence by the crowded court, and when Marion had finished reading, there was a burst of applause, which the officers had some difficulty in repressing. The judges, after consulting together for a few minutes, announced that they would adjourn for two hours, that they might have time to consider what course they should adopt in conse-

quence of the singular statement which had just been read. After this they retired, accompanied by the advocate-depute and the counsel for the accused ; but the interest felt by the audience in the case was so intense, that they waited patiently in their places till the business of the court was resumed.

When the judges returned, the advocate-depute rose and informed the bench that the charge against the accused was withdrawn, and the jury, without retiring, gave a formal verdict of "Not guilty." Their verdict was received with a burst of applause, which the officers of the court did not even attempt to repress, and before it had ceased, Ninian had been carried off by his friends.

Stirling was committed for trial at the next assizes, and the feeling of indignation against him was so general that the officers had some difficulty in protecting him from violence while he was being conducted from the court-house to the jail.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMONG the miller's papers was found his will, in which he had bequeathed the whole of his property to Ninian, with the exception of a small pension for Ailie, his house-keeper. He had always had the reputation of being wealthy, but no one had ever dreamed that he could have amassed such a large fortune as now came into Ninian's possession. About the same time his old friend Baillie MacGabbie died, and after setting aside a considerable sum for the support of different charitable institutions, left the rest of his property to Ninian Kynoch, "in order," as he said, "to express his admiration of his character, and of the fortitude he had shown when labouring under a false accusation." Fortune seemed anxious to atone to him for his previous mishaps, by showering upon him her richest gifts, and he proved himself worthy of her kindness by the use

which he made of his wealth. Stormy Jack became the owner of a smack far superior to the one which had been lost on the memorable day of the storm, and was only prevented by his own feelings of independence from receiving other proofs of his son's devoted attachment and filial affection, while Mrs. Kynoch became the occupant of the finest house in Loanhead, which was built expressly for her use. No happiness, however, is perfect in this world, and the worthy woman's great grievance through life was that she should ever have been so foolish as to leave her old house, where she had spent thirty years of her married life, for one which, as she said, "was far owre gran' for an auld wife like her."

A few months after the trial Ninian became the husband of Marion Leslie, with the full consent and approval of her father and uncle. Captain Leslie felt so grateful to the family who had sheltered his friendless daughter, and to the man who had saved his life, that, on learning the state of Marion's affections, he would willingly have bestowed her hand upon Ninian, even if he had continued as pocr as before. The fortune which

he had acquired abroad was sufficient to meet all the claims of his brother's creditors upon the Inverchewan estate, and he was wealthy enough to be able to indulge his own humour in choosing a poor student for his son-in-law, if such had been his will and pleasure. Ninian, however, might have been humiliated by a match where all the advantages of fortune were on one side, as they would have been, if he had not become the heir of the property which had been left by his uncle and Baillie Mac Gabbie. It was found that the laird's principal creditor was the miller's heir, and when Captain Leslie jocularly asked whether Ninian would accept his daughter's hand in payment of his claims, the latter joyfully accepted the offer, and Marion offered no resistance to this convenient arrangement.

After their marriage they left Inverchewan Castle, and travelled for about a year on the continent. The old laird died before they returned; he had never quite recovered from the shock which his pride and vanity had received through the exposure of his pecuniary embarrassments in an open court. He was found dead in the picture gallery,

seated in his arm-chair, with his face turned toward those grim figures on the wall, the sight of which had been the great solace of his existence. His death was sincerely lamented by the poor, to whom he had ever been a kind friend, and his last recorded wish was that Ninian should assume the name of Leslie, which had been connected from time immemorial with the Inverchewan estates. Ninian complied with this request, which proved that the laird had persisted to the last in regarding his own grandfather as a myth, and in maintaining the antiquity of the Leslie family.

Captain Leslie resumed his former profession, and obtained an important command in the navy. He had led such an active life that he could not settle down to enjoy the fortune which he had acquired, and found more pleasure in the active duties of his profession than in the retirement of private life. Such time as he could spare from his professional duties was spent at Inverchewan Castle, in the society of his daughter and her husband, who lived chiefly there. Their second son, Frank, followed his grandfather's profession.

Sprung from the people himself, Ninian knew their wants and requirements, and devoted his time and his wealth to the improvement of his tenantry and of the poor fishermen of the neighbouring villages. In all his philanthropic schemes he found a judicious adviser and a ready coadjutor in his wife, who accompanied him in his visits to the cottages of the poor, and ministered to their wants with her own hands. Mr. Hamilton became the almoner of her bounty among the more distant poor whom she could not visit, and it might be said with truth of her, as of the virtuous woman described in Scripture, that she reaped of the fruits of her hands, and that her own works praised her in the gates.

The spirits of both had been chastened by affliction, and the remembrance of their past sufferings made them more ready to sympathize with others. Under their auspices the village of Loanhead became the model of a fishing village. A schoolmaster, worthy of the name, took Stirling's place, and a school-room where human beings could breathe, was erected at Ninian's expense. The young fishermen were instructed in the elements of

science, and taught to have more confidence in the barometer than in the sayings of those wiseacres whose prophecies had so often proved destructive of human life. By striving to make others happy they found happiness themselves, and the stream of their lives, which had been at first so troubled, was in the end calm and peaceful.

Stirling was tried and convicted of the crime of murder. Sentence of death was pronounced upon him, but owing to the influence of a nobleman who had been an officer in his former regiment, and who exerted himself in his behalf, it was not carried into execution. He was condemned to penal servitude for life, and spent some years in one of our distant colonies, from which he at length contrived to make his escape. He never returned to Islayhead, and nothing would have been known of his fate if it had not been for an incident which befell Ninian while travelling in the south of France.

While at Marseilles he had the curiosity to visit the establishment where the "*condamnés aux travaux forcés*" are employed. He had almost completed his visit, and was

about to leave the place, when his eye happened to fall upon a tall convict, whose features were familiar to him. There was no mistaking that rugged face, whose native ugliness was enhanced by the scars of former wounds, or that erect figure, which towered above the other convict to whom he was chained. It was Stirling the school-master. Ninian advanced to him and addressed him by name, but he shook his head and turned away, as if he did not understand what was said. The lively guide who had shown Ninian over the building, smiled on observing this encounter.

"Your countryman is not proud of meeting with his compatriots."

"He is an Englishman then?" said Ninian.

"Yes. He came here about two years ago, and we shall take good care that he does not leave this in a hurry. *C'est un garçon terrible.*"

"What brought him here?"

"An attempt at assassination. Though an Englishman by birth, he was married to a French woman. You will easily conceive that he was not the most amiable of hus-

bands, and his wife doubtless had her own reasons for leaving him and returning to France. She was possessed of some wealth, and soon found another husband, as she gave herself out to be a widow. For some years she heard nothing of this brigand, whom she believed to be dead, when one evening he pounced upon her in a small wood near the cottage where she lived. He did not speak a word, or assign any reason for the act, but he grasped her by the throat and tried to strangle her. He might have succeeded if she had not been a powerful woman, who struggled bravely for life, and he had not been weakened by wandering in the woods without food. As it was she contrived to shake him off, and to scream for assistance. He closed with her again, and as he had a knife, it would have fared badly with her if her husband had not come to her assistance. His rage was directed against the husband, who closed with him, and after receiving several wounds, succeeded in taking the knife from him. He was secured, and handed over to the authorities. When his trial came on he admitted his guilt, and expressed his regret at not

having succeeded in this attempt. The woman, he said, was worthy of death; she had robbed him of all he possessed, and tried to bring him to the gallows by a false accusation. He spoke in French with a rude eloquence which touched the heart of the jury, who found him guilty of the attempt, with extenuating circumstances. He was condemned to the galleys for life."

Ninian took his purse, and gave it to the keeper.

"Be as kind to this miserable man as the rules of the prison will permit."

"*Merci*, I will not forget."

And now the lights are extinguished, and the curtain falls. It depends on you, gentle reader, whether we ever meet again.

Au revoir, n'est-ce pas ?

THE END.

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